COMET BOOKS

The Five Gifts

The Story of Bhoodan and Vinoba Bhave

R. P. MASANI

Foreword by
Dr. Rajendra Prasad

2/6 COLLINS 2/6

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2017 with funding from
Public.Resource.Org

https://archive.org/details/fivegifts00masa

THE FIVE GIFTS

ALSO IN COMET BOOKS

1. YOUR BABY — *A Guide for Parents Everywhere*
2. THE UNIVERSE AND DR. EINSTEIN — *By Lincoln Barnett*
3. ALBERT SCHWEITZER : An Introduction — *By Jacques Feschotte*
4. THE EISENHOWER BROTHERS — *By Bela Kornitzer*
5. GUIDE TO THE MOON — *By Patrick Moore*, F.R.A.S.
6. SHAKESPEARE — *By Ivor Brown*
7. AMBASSADOR'S REPORT — *By Chester Bowles*
8. THE FIVE GIFTS : The Story of Bhoodan — *By R. P. Masani*
9. THE LIVING JEFFERSON — *By James T. Adams*
11. HOW ENGINES WORK — *By Michael Gibson*
12. HELEN KELLER — *By Van Wyck Brooks*
13. GUIDE TO THE PLANETS — *By Patrick Moore*, F.R.A.S.
15. WESTWARD THE WOMEN — *By Nancy Wilson Ross*
16. THE STORY OF OUR CIVILISATION — *By Philip Lee Ralph*

If you would like to be kept informed of new and forthcoming titles please apply to your local bookseller—

or write to :

COLLINS PAPER BOOKS LTD

14 ST JAMES'S PLACE · LONDON, S.W.1

THE FIVE GIFTS

by

R. P. MASANI

With a Foreword by

DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD

COMET BOOKS

COLLINS

First published 1957
First issued in Comet Books 1957

Printed in Great Britain by
Collins Clear-Type Press : London and Glasgow

CONTENTS

Chapter		*Page*
	PREFACE	7
	FOREWORD by DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD	9
	INTRODUCTION	16
1	RURAL POVERTY—THE CHALLENGE	25
2	THE ANSWER—BHOODAN	32
3	SANT VINOBA	43
4	ON TO THE CITY OF GOD!	59
5	IN THE LAND OF LORD BUDDHA	79
6	FORGING AHEAD FROM GIFT TO GIFT	104
7	THE CALL OF BODH GAYA	123
8	THE LIFE DEDICATION OF JAYAPRAKASH	142
9	SAMPATTIDAN—VINOBA'S GOSPEL OF WEALTH	153
10	DISTRIBUTION—THE ACID TEST	166
11	THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BHOODAN	184

With respectful friendship
to MR & MRS ATTENBOROUGH
on their visit at
Ahmedabad

PREFACE

FOR THE PRIVILEGE and pleasure of writing this story of an unparalleled human endeavour for the regeneration of society the author is indebted to the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom, which issued the invitation and kindly placed at his disposal the service of Shri Sooryakant Parikh, a Bhoodan enthusiast, who collected much useful material from Hindi sources. The author's thanks are due to him for the zeal and ability with which he has carried out this task. He is also indebted to several Bhoodan workers, notably Shri Jayaprakash Narayan and Shrimati Vimlabehen Thakkar, to whom he had to refer several problems. For the signal favour of finding time to write the Foreword to this book, the author tenders his warmest thanks to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the erudite and esteemed President of the Indian Republic. There is none amongst us who can speak with more authority of the profound significance and work of Vinobaji's mission than can this close associate of both Gandhiji and Vinoba ; he is as devoted as they are to the cause of Sarvodaya.

R. P. M.

from.
Sooryakant Parikh
Patel Building
Ellisbridge
Ahmedabad 6
Tel- 78014

24th Nov 1963 Sudha.

FOREWORD

THE ATTAINMENT of Independence by India was an important event in the history of the world, concerned as it was with the life of some 400 millions of human beings. The means and the methods employed in attaining it were of still greater importance and significance when we consider their implications and the effect they have already had and are bound to have in a greater degree in the future on the political, social and moral plane. They will especially affect the fate and future of what is known as colonialism, adopted and practised by European nations against the peoples of other countries of the world.

A little consideration of the historical aspect of the application and development of the method will show how it came to be adopted, and how its scope is not yet exhausted. When Mahatma Gandhi arrived in India from South Africa, India was seething with a discontent as old as the establishment of British rule itself. India had tried the method of open revolt and had failed. She had adopted and tried constitutional methods, inspired by faith in British history, in the British constitution and in the good faith of the British based on declarations of British leaders and statesmen from time to time. While many still adhered to this policy and method, others arose who were dissatisfied with it, and preached and practised other methods, including the use of violence and of what are popularly known as revolutionary and terrorist methods. Mahatma Gandhi was not the man to leave things to take their own course, particularly after his experiences in South Africa, and he had to devise a way which would

steer clear of the Scylla of what was derisively described approvingly by its followers as constitutional, and the Charybdis of revolution and terrorism. At the time of his arrival in India, he was a believer in British democracy and the British constitution, and his sympathies were rather with those who pursued constitutional methods. The Rowlatt Act, however, passed in March 1919, impelled him to proclaim March 30th a day of mourning and a general strike. This marked the beginning of non-co-operation. But it was not until 1920-21, when all his constitutional efforts had failed to get redress for what became popularly known as the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs, that he lost faith and adopted the aim of ending British rule. He advocated the method of non-violent non-co-operation and the country followed him. All methods of open violent revolt, constitutionalism and revolutionary terrorism had been tried, and had not yielded the results expected. Discontent was mounting, but there was no apparent solution. The Mahatma adopted the novel approach which on the one hand repudiated violence, yet on the other did not depend on the good grace of the British, but had an inherent strength of its own. Swaraj was to be wrung from unwilling British hands by the simple withdrawal of support from British rule. The masses followed him, and even the so-called terrorists called a truce to their methods in order to give this novel method a trial. Gandhiji was careful from the very beginning to lay emphasis on non-violence as an essential element (as distinguished from mere expediency) in his philosophy and programme of action. He was a firm believer in the maxim that the righteousness of the end does not and cannot justify the use of unrighteous means in attaining it. If wrong means are employed, and in the process the end itself becomes deformed and distorted, what is ultimately attained is not the righteous end as originally conceived,

but something akin to the unrighteous means applied. He was so firm in his views that on many an occasion between 1920, when his movement took shape, and 1947, when it fructified into a campaign for the Independence of India, he held back, retraced his steps and withdrew or suspended his immediate programme, to the chagrin and disappointment of many of his followers and associates. It was not unnatural that the world at large began to take interest in the progress of this novel experiment, and he became a famous world figure. But if we look at it from his point of view, attainment of political Swaraj, important and indispensable as such freedom was, was not the ultimate aim but only a step towards it. The ultimate aim was nothing less than a complete and revolutionary change in human society and prevailing human values. Its attainment was to result in a social order based on truth and non-violence, from which exploitation in all forms was to be eliminated, inequality replaced by equality, competition by co-operation and hatred by goodwill and love. He lived to see the attainment of Swaraj, although he was disappointed and distressed over the circumstances in which it was attained. As soon as he found that events were out of control, and that some of his worst fears had materialised, he set himself to repair the damage. If only he had lived, he would undoubtedly have done so, as he had done on several other occasions. It is true that on previous occasions the damage was not as great, but the opportunities and perhaps also the facilities for repairing it were now very much greater. Having once set the house in order, or perhaps in the process of doing so, I have no doubt that he would have attained the larger objective of ushering in the new social order of his own conception.

What Acharya Vinoba has been attempting through his Bhoodan movement is an extension of the efforts of Mahatma Gandhi, and the further application of his

method. Man is deeply attached to property and is loath to part with it. Immense inequality in the matter of material possessions, and disparity in opportunity between different sections and classes of society, clamour for redress and readjustment. Equality in possessions—not to speak of natural talents and capacity—cannot be achieved, much less maintained even if once established, by force or coercion for any appreciable length of time. Any attempt at enforcement involves violence by individuals or groups, and cannot therefore be free of exploitation. Vinoba, therefore, revived and reinforced the ancient time-honoured doctrine of trusteeship, which does not require enforcement or suppression of any kind, but is the result of the voluntary effort of the possessor of wealth. It requires or rather expects him to hold his possessions not for his own exclusive benefit or enjoyment but in trust for others. The ownership of property thus loses its sting for others, and the natural talents possessed by individuals are not suppressed but utilised for the benefit of others. This idea derives from the age-old Indian principles of (3-asteya) non-thieving and (3-aparigraha) non-possession which require a man not to have more than he needs, and not to hoard.

In the course of the political movement for freedom, it was confirmed that a man loves his property even more than his freedom and his life. When called upon to undergo suffering and sacrifice, people were willing and ready to court imprisonment and other forms of bodily suffering, and even to face loss of life, but were not equally prepared to suffer loss of property. There was no opportunity therefore of putting the principle of trusteeship to practical test. A social order of the type contemplated by Mahatma Gandhi could not be thought of without recognition and full acceptance of the principle of trusteeship. There were individuals who gave up their all,

including their possessions and prospects, at the call of Mahatma Gandhi. The lives of the great founders of Buddhism and Jainism furnish outstanding examples of this kind of renunciation. But renunciation in the sense of holding property in trust for the benefit of others has never been attempted on a large scale—or on a nation-wide scale. The movement of Sant Vinoba is an experiment in that direction.

Of all forms of property, land is the most valued in India, because it is the most stable form of property and provides the necessities of life. In India people are known to fight among themselves for small areas of land, both with weapons and in the law courts. It is therefore natural that while possession of land is held in high respect, its non-possession, particularly by those who work on it on behalf of others as mere wage-earners, is a fruitful cause of discontent. Sant Vinoba took up this question of land almost by accident. He was not unaware of the situation, but as the following pages of Shri Masani's book will show, he was not quite clear in his own mind how to deal with it. The phenomenal success which has attended his Bhoodan appeal, resulting in the voluntary gift by thousands of owners of land of more than 4.5 million acres, throughout the length and breadth of the country, has been a marvellous and astounding event in the social history not only of India but of the world. It expresses in some measure the principle of aparigraha non-hoarding, because only a small proportion of those who possess land have given up all. Most of the donors have given only a part of their possessions. In fact, Vinobaji's appeal is that he should be treated as an additional member of the family and that his share should therefore be given to him. But the movement has opened up new vistas of work, and it holds out hope for practical application of the principle of trusteeship and the establishment

of a society based on non-violence. We see further developments of the principle of renunciation, in the form of gifts of wealth, labour, and intellectual capabilities.

There are movements in the world for establishing an egalitarian society under which there will be better distribution of wealth and equality of opportunities for all. But none is based on a conception of non-possession, and every one of them therefore carries within it the germs of its own ultimate destruction. The objective of all such movements is possession, and higher and higher standards of material comforts for everyone. At the most these movements aim at curtailment of the possessions of those who have much, but there is no limit prescribed. The idea seems to be that human happiness is based on material possessions, and the more provided, the happier will be humanity. It is a matter of common experience, however, that many who amass wealth are not contented or happy, while others living in poverty are both contented and happy. There are men who find pleasure and happiness in renunciation rather than in possession. Lasting happiness cannot be attained as long as there is longing for more. The Hindi poet Tulsidas has said that greed increases as more and more is gained: therefore a lasting solution of the problem must begin at the source, and the Indian way is to hold aloft the superiority not of possession but of non-possession. This does not require or imply lack of possessions and the damping of initiative and incentive. It sets a just and proper value on material possessions. The principle of trusteeship is only an application in modern form and language of the same principle of non-possession. The Bhoodan movement with its voluntary gifts of the most valued kind of property by the rich and the poor alike is a concrete manifestation of the same principle in action. It is, therefore, as Vinobaji has himself said, much more than a mere gift of land. The spirit

behind it gives a vision of the social order that Mahatma Gandhi envisaged, and kindles and enlivens the hope of its attainment. Even amongst Mahatma Gandhi's followers few could see all the implications of his non-violent approach to the solution of all problems—individual, social, national or international. His approach was successful in the struggle for national freedom. The Bhoodan movement is showing its capacity to solve our most urgent social problem. May it not contain the seed which may sprout and blossom and fructify, and also solve the most urgent problem of the world, that of material possession in one form or another? India will have done her duty if she can usher in a society based on non-violent non-possession, just as her non-violent non-co-operation has shown the way to the solution of problems in a political field. Sant Vinoba will have crowned a remarkable career of happiness in renunciation and in work if he can show his countrymen and the world at large the way to such a social order, based on and achieved through non-violence.

As an interested observer, Shri Masani has not only watched the movement as it has progressed, but as a student of social problems has also studied it. This book is the result of his deep study of an absorbing subject, which is not only claiming the attention of all classes of people in our country but also of many serious thinkers outside India. It has, therefore, a value of its own, and I commend it with confidence to the public.

RAJENDRA PRASAD

New Delhi,
6th April, 1956

INTRODUCTION

"ACCEPT, O Lord, the fruit of our labour, grant us New Life and raise among us Rishis to enrich our lives with the wealth of wisdom!"

In Vedic times the ancient Aryans fervently prayed for the advent of the great seers, the most precious asset of a community. Their prayer was granted. India was blessed with numbers of sages from age to age. Since those tranquil days eminent spiritual leaders have continued to appear, and have inspired the people. Even during days of turmoil, weakness and bondage, profound thinkers and preachers held aloft the torch of spiritual knowledge, heartened the people and enriched their lives.

The Rishis, or holy men of vision, brought with them the message of the kinship of man with man, and of man with God; they taught about human unity and world community, stating that there was but one life, one Self in all. The greatest importance was attached to the purification of one's self and the practice of truth and non-violence. They prayed earnestly for peace, "peace to all heavenly bodies, to space and water and earth and air, peace to animals and plants, peace to all and everything." Non-violence was not intended for saints only. It was meant for the common man as well. It was the law of the human species; violence was the law of the brute. Reverence for life, the dignity of human personality, the fulfilment of man's destiny, demanded allegiance to a law higher than that of the jungle—the strength of the spirit, soul-force.

"Blessed are the poor," was the beatitude with which Jesus Christ opened his Sermon on the Mount. He meant the poor in spirit. "Blessed be the strong," may be taken

to be the Rishis' beatitude, based on the teaching of the Veda as well as the Avesta. In return for their love-offering to the Almighty, the ancient Aryans prayed for strength, *Shakti,* from " the Giver of Strength "—strength of the body, strength of the mind, strength of the spirit, all to be dedicated to the service of the Lord and of mankind.

The greatest world-famous sage of the modern era was Mahatma Gandhi. Preaching his gospel of truth, non-violence and soul-force, he left behind him his ennobling message—a plea for the evolution of a new social order based on love, concord and co-operation. After him his most gifted and trusted disciple, Acharya Vinoba Bhave, " the patriarch hoary, the Sage of his kith and the hamlet," lit the fire of Bhoodan Yagna (land-gift sacrifice), which was to consume man's selfishness and greed and to generate soul-force, love and the fellow-feeling essential for the classless society which he seeks to create. His Bhoodan mission, the inspiration of a splendidly endowed spiritual teacher, has caused a strange ferment in rural India. It is, however, the excitement caused by the stirring of passions and emotions; it is the enthusiasm evoked by an unprecedented peaceful appeal to the noble instincts and sensibilities of the people, high and low, to help in transforming an unjust system.

Primarily initiated to obtain, through love, land for the landless, Bhoodan is the first step towards the spiritual conversion of both the giver and the receiver, and of society in general, for the redress of social wrongs. Strikingly original in its conception, avowedly revolutionary in its aims, non-violent and peaceful yet vigorous and forceful, unique in its technique, it bids fair to succeed as the greatest peaceful revolution in history for the reconstruction of society on the foundation of the intellectual and spiritual strength of the people. Launched courageously,

with full faith in God and confidence in the justice of the cause, it has already made considerable headway as a comprehensive programme for reform in all walks of life. It will afford an object-lesson to the nations of the world. In England an appeal for funds to help Vinoba's Bhoodan mission was made recently by seven prominent Britons. It indicates that not a few thinkers, philosophers, writers and politicians have already been deeply impressed by the importance of Bhoodan as "a constructive self-help programme," affording an opportunity for co-operation between ordinary people in different Commonwealth countries, which should be "the mainspring of the Commonwealth," and also a philosophy of life pointing to the remedy for all the social, economic and political ills of human society. This philosophical aspect of the movement has evoked wide-spread interest in the U.S.A. and other countries of the world. Hardly a month passes without a correspondent of a newspaper or an author from the West coming to pay his homage to "India's Walking Messiah," to study the movement on the spot, or to ply Vinobaji with searching questions concerning the philosophy behind his mission.

The hero of this romantic episode in the history of India is the meekest disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. In advance of his comrades in his adherence to the teaching of that great master, transcending the master himself in austerity and spiritual discipline, asking only that his humble self may be merged in the Self Universal, this trusted colleague of Gandhiji was until yesterday a recluse and a mystic—not one who had turned his back on the world but one who, though not of it, had remained in it, quietly dedicating his time, talents and energy to the cause of the uplift of the submerged and suffering classes of the population. Today, however, he stands at the head of a steadily growing number of enthu-

siastic volunteers, as the toughest colleague of Gandhiji, bent on establishing a new social order in which there should be no distinction of class or caste, no denial of human rights, no exploitation, and no tolerance of social wrong. It is his conviction that, as the Bhoodan mission is popularised, people living in rural India will become more and more conscious of their rights and will not tolerate exploitation of any kind. By following the technique of love and non-violence they will, he believes, succeed in changing the hearts of owners of land, as he does.

"Lend a helping hand to the landless," has been the slogan of standard-bearers of agrarian reform all over the world for a long time. It is New India's crying need. It is also the call for to-morrow not only for owners of land but also for the state governments and society in general. Old though the demand is, the technique of getting land through love is certainly new and is Vinobaji's own creation. It may be explained in his own words. There is a general belief among the people of India that on certain days a dip in the waters of the holy river Ganges will wipe away sin. "This Ganga," says Vinoba, "flows hidden in every human heart. I want to let it out and set it flowing in and through the whole of society. Just as King Bhagirath brought down the Ganga from the celestial region to the earth, so do we want, with the name of the Lord on our lips, to bring the Ganga hidden in the human heart out into the life of individuals and society." Political freedom has brought home rule to India. The economic freedom of the villages, he says, will bring her *Sarvodaya* (the uplift of all). This spiritual freedom, freedom from lust, anger and greed, will bring the kingdom of God on earth. The fervent exponent of this new gospel has declared his resolve not to return to his *ashram* (refuge) at Paunar "until the land problem of India is satisfactorily solved."

For his followers and other admirers this is a very disconcerting decision. What will happen if the problem is not solved to his satisfaction?

Bhoodan itself cannot solve the land problem throughout India. It can only show the way, and create the necessary atmosphere. Politicians, legislators, administrators, must eventually shoulder their responsibilities and play their part in the solution of the whole problem. Vinobaji is aware of the difficulties. But whether cooperation from everyone is forthcoming or not, the intrepid sage has made up his mind to pursue his course with full faith in the justice of his cause. Having witnessed almost daily during the last five years the upsurge of a feeling of goodness in numerous donors of land, he is all the more strengthened in his belief that man is a thinking being, endowed with a feeling of goodness and compassion, and that he will not fail to appreciate the significance and justice of his demand. Relying on this conviction for the success of his mission, he puts forward as a matter of right his claim for land on behalf of the needy. How far he will succeed, neither he nor anyone can foresee. He can only strive for the end in view. The fruit rests with God, whose blessings, he believes, are with him. Speaking at Bodh Gaya on January 30, 1953, he said: "There is no question of peace or no peace in my heart. I enjoy peace on all fronts. This work of mine may succeed or I may go—I have peace in both, and I am prepared for both."

What could have impelled this solitude-seeking scholar and self-effacing social worker to plunge, in the evening of his life, into a campaign inseparable from politics? What are the circumstances that have driven a silent ashramite who, it seemed, had taken a vow of silence, and who, while helping the national struggle for freedom in his own way, had studiously shunned publicity for more

than thirty years, to abandon the luxury of study and seclusion and come out of his cell to lead a revolutionary movement unique in the history of India and the history of the world? To find an answer to these questions, to understand the working of his mind and to appreciate the spiritual ideas behind this movement, is the object of this book. The aim is also to indicate how this unique move for a radical change in the organisation of society has influenced the minds and hearts of a large section of the people and has created an atmosphere conducive to a peaceful revolution.

Incidentally the reader will also be given a glimpse into the life of this Grand Old Man of rural India. The story of that life is the story of a modern saint, the rhythm of whose life is in tune with the Universal life. There is a difference, however: mystic and ascetic though he is, he does not feel called upon to leave the world. He feels rather that he is led by Providence to lose himself in it. In the latest phase of his career, he emerges as a saint turned temporarily into a revolutionary politician. It is not, however, a case of politics affecting sainthood. It is a case of saintliness spiritualising politics and enabling society to march triumphantly to the cherished goal of order rooted in human brotherhood and love, an order which gives every individual the opportunity to lead a peaceful, purposeful, creative and co-operative life.

Bhoodan has now become a comprehensive term for all sorts of gifts for the uplift of the poor and the backward classes of the population. It comprises the gift of love, the gift of intelligence, the gift of means of cultivation, the gift of a share in a person's wealth and the gift of individual labour—all logical developments of the movement for equitable distribution of land, which is one of the principal factors in the reorganisation of society. It is essential for every individual to realise the need for

such a movement, to estimate aright its significance and bearing on society as a whole and to embrace the great ideal underlying it. Vinobaji aims at bringing about a salutary change in human relationship and in man's concept of the values of life; his ideal is to rebuild the foundations of human thought and to inspire the peoples of the world to live on terms of fellowship and goodwill. "Terms of fellowship" do not imply absolute economic equality. As Vinobaji has repeatedly declared, Bhoodan merely aims at emphasising the doctrine that land, like air and water, should be accessible to all, not that everyone should share it equally. Similarly, the gift of wealth implies the distribution of the surplus wealth of the rich among the less fortunate, in order to supply their basic needs. Equality may come gradually, as the sense of ownership gives way to the claims of society.

Is it a saint's dream or a practical proposition? Will Vinoba be able to secure fifty million acres of cultivable land before the end of 1957? Has good progress been made since he began his mission, aiming at the establishment of heaven on earth? Has distribution of land led to increased production and prosperity not only of the families who have received land, but also of society in general? Has it, on the other hand, led to an increase in uneconomic holdings and distribution of poverty, as some people fear? Is there an efficient organisation to ensure improvement in the economic as well as in the intellectual and moral condition of the people? What is the sum total of the benefits flowing from the distribution of land?

These questions may be met by a few counter-questions. Can a spiritual movement which its leader regards as inspired by God, and on which he has embarked with full faith in the inherent goodness of man, be subjected to a coldly critical analysis? Can it be assessed as if it were a

national welfare project launched by a department of the Government, or an industrial enterprise of a Corporation of hardheaded businessmen? Cannot a saint claim the right to proceed on the lines followed by Buddha and Christ? Vinoba claims no immunity from a rational analysis. He goes his own way, conceding to critics their right to criticise the movement from their point of view. It is right, however, when a spiritual movement is closely linked to agrarian reforms and to economic and political problems, that questions concerning the feasibility of the movement and the administration of the vast estate held in trust by Vinobaji on behalf of society should be satisfactorily answered. An attempt is accordingly made to deal with them in Chapter X "Distribution: The Acid Test."

Whatever may be the outcome of this extraordinary mission, the story of Vinoba's life will be the story of rejuvenated rural India. Gandhiji belonged not only to his own era but to all time. Towering above his contemporaries in moral grandeur, he endeavoured to spiritualise politics. So also does his disciple Vinoba through Bhoodan Yagna. For five years he has continually travelled the roads of India, covering about 15,000 miles, going from village to village, adored by crowds gathered to hear him on his journey, at his camp and prayer meetings. Except that his beard and hair are turning grey, this adopted son of Gandhiji appears to the people to be Gandhi-like. He addresses them in the same soft and soothing way, and speaks from the heart, as Bapu did, inspiring them with his message of hope for the dawn of a new era of peace and goodwill. He longs to be regarded as of no importance, and believes that anything he achieves comes from God. He tells his audiences repeatedly, "If Gandhiji had not passed away, how could I even have thought of coming forward?" After Bapu's death he felt impelled to overcome his shyness and come forward to continue his work. No wonder

millions of Indians in the cities, as well as in the villages, have given their hearts to him as Bapu's successor. No wonder thousands of owners of land and other property have responded cheerfully to his appeal and that an ever-increasing number of men and women of goodwill have come forward to participate in the great sacrifice. When the names of national leaders and heroes are consigned to the dust-bin of history, when people no longer remember what they said and did, the name of this Sage of modern India, with his gospel of Sarvodaya, the uplift of all, will be forever remembered as that of the greatest thinker, teacher and benefactor of his day, second only to Gandhiji. He is the man of the hour, who preaches to the people reverence for life; the sage who is also a man of action, with a robust, realistic mind, a creative and vitalising force in the life of the people, faced with a fundamental task more formidable than any yet undertaken for ensuring the peace, happiness and progress of mankind.

R. P. M.

Chapter One

RURAL POVERTY—THE CHALLENGE

THE INDIA of to-day, sunk in poverty, once dazzled the world with its wealth and splendour. Pliny, Strabo and Herodotus have described in superlatives the riches of the Indies; early ambassadors and travellers from Greece and Rome have supported the stories with even more resplendent facts. "The wealth of Ormuz and of Ind" stirred the imagination of Jacobean and Elizabethan poets and whetted the appetite of European adventurers.

There was no problem then, it seems, about ownership of land or unequal distribution of wealth. Long before Christians in Europe were taught that "the earth is the Lord's," the Indian people learned: "The land is my mother." By this they understood that they had a right to be fed from the earth's produce. Man did not then hunger for land; the land was there pleading for man to till it. Those who cultivated it properly received the earth's blessing; those who neglected their land forfeited it. Throughout an Asia of differing religious tenets this was a fundamental belief. "Whoso sows corn, sows righteousness," spake Zarathushtra, the ancient Iranian philosopher and prophet whose voice is still a living voice in the homes of modern Parsis.

It was not only wealth that made early India famous in history. The country developed a unique and orderly civilisation. Man's first step towards becoming civilised was taken within the clan or family unit. He did not recognise individual ownership of land even when families came together to form protective communities. Members of

groups lived together as a single family, and shared the fruit of joint endeavour. Only when economic advance led to the interdependence of various communities and to the division of labour did society divide into the self-employed, the employers and the employees. Even then, the memory of common ancestry and the consciousness of blood bonds remained the basis of the community for centuries. This led to a remarkable development of corporate life and co-operation. In the early Vedic, Epic and Pali literature of India there appear fully developed local bodies, distinct and influential. Long before self-governing institutions were developed in Europe, Indian towns and villages had an elaborate system of administrative and judicial councils, of which the *Panchayat* (the five elders of the village sitting in council), is the best known because it lasted the longest.

In his *Rise of the Maratha Power,* Mahadeo Govind Ranade observes that the elaborate system of village councils had been developed in ancient India to a point which enabled it to survive all foreign interference. The survival, however, was only a faint relic of the past. One by one the ancient units of local government gradually disappeared, as invaders came in quick succession. From the mountains came Scythians, Turkomans, Pathans, Mongolians, Marathas, from the sea the merchant explorers, Portuguese, Dutch, French and English. When the British assumed territorial sovereignty in India, the popular urban and provincial assemblies had totally disappeared. Their decay dates from the 7th century. The imperialism of the Guptas and the centralised despotism of the Muslims and the Mughals were partly responsible for the decline. When the English annexed the Peshwa's dominions early in the 19th century, the only popular assembly existing in the Deccan was the village council, the *Panchayat.* This

alone had survived the shock of centuries, and Mountstuart Elphinstone, when he became Governor of Bombay, did his best to preserve it. The village that Elphinstone knew in the 1820's is the village which to-day Vinoba seeks to recreate in his scheme of village self-government. "Each township," Elphinstone wrote, "conducts its own internal affairs. It levies on its members the revenue due to the state and is collectively responsible for the full amount. It manages its own police and is answerable for any property plundered within its limits. It administers justice to its own members to the extent of punishing small offences and deciding disputes in the first instance. It takes upon itself to provide funds for its internal expenses. . . . It is provided with the requisite officers for conducting these duties . . . and though entirely subject to the general government is in many respects an organised commonwealth complete within itself."

India, since Elphinstone's day, has in many respects developed into a modern nation; yet on the whole, her people have sunk deeper and deeper into poverty. During the last eight years frequent official and private investigations have produced startling reports on rural India. These tell of land hunger, semi-starvation, dire poverty, hopeless indebtedness. The picture has altered little over the past three-quarters of a century. Dadabhai Naoroji, the first Indian to attempt an assessment of the national income, computed it in 1876, on necessarily inadequate data, at Rs. 20 per head per annum. The evidence later collected by him for his book, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, did not warrant any increase in the original figure. Twenty-five years later Lord Curzon could put his estimate no higher than Rs. 30. In 1931, the Central Banking Enquiry Committee concluded that the average income of an agriculturist in British India did not "work out at a

higher figure than about Rs. 42 a year." Enquiries all revealed that the holdings of the average cultivator were generally small and scattered. He was unable to earn his livelihood from the land. Born in debt, he lived and died in debt. Since 1931 India as a nation has undergone revolutionary political and economic changes, yet these changes have hardly touched rural India. The recent All-India Rural Credit Survey relates the same story of crushing poverty.

When Congress became the government of India in 1947, the party's leaders announced their determination to establish a welfare state and to secure "a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform the institutions of national life." They well realised that the crucial issue was that of land reform. Without that, there could be no lasting improvement in any direction. The first Five Year Plan (1951) stressed the need for an increase in production. The popular ministries in the States were urged to legislate and provide funds for transforming the structure of rural economy. The improvement of conditions for landless labourers and small cultivators with uneconomic holdings was to be given the highest priority. India's leaders were pledged not to perpetuate a system in which human beings could, by accident of birth, live out their lives as slaves to the owners of land. *Sarvodaya,* the total good of all, the word of great spiritual power coined by Mahatma Gandhi, was the aim.

To the planners of 1951 the most daunting prospect was agriculture. The census of that year showed that there were 357 million Indians, five out of every six of them living in villages. Seventy per cent of the entire population depended on agriculture for a livelihood, and the pressure of the population on land was therefore inexorable. India, a nation of small farmers, is unlucky in the land available for farming. Of her vast 180 million acres

only about 62% are cultivable, a figure much below the world average. Nor does cultivable land always remain fit to be cultivated. A succession of floods or droughts can ruin for ever land which once was prosperous; survey figures in fact show a steady decline in India's cultivated area. In the same period there has been a tremendous increase in population. Consequently by 1951 the whole cultivable area represented only 1.4 acres per head of India's population, and the net sown area 0.8 acre. Over the whole Indian Union the average size of holding was 7.5 acres, though in some places, notably West Bengal (4.7) and Bihar (4.1), it was much smaller. The difference between the average holding and the pitiful "possible holding" of 1.4 acres per head tells the tales of the millions of landless peasants throughout India. An analysis of the holdings makes the story grimmer. "Large cultivators" (those owning more than 30 acres, numbering 30% of all Indian cultivators) farm 58% of the total sown area. "Medium cultivators" (owning slightly over 6 acres; 40% of all cultivators) hold less than 33% of the sown area, while "small cultivators" (owning less than 3 acres; 30% of all cultivators) work only a tenth of the land. The smaller the size of the farm, the more the farmer has to depend on family labour, and the greater the unemployment of hired labour in the village.

Such was rural India in 1951. Small farmers and landless labourers were sinking deeper into debt and hunger. Apart from the problems of land ownership and tenancy rights, there was urgent need for a complete overhaul in the methods of production, marketing and rural credit. The government of course had its plans for national development, but there was a longing, not then vocal but growing steadily more articulate, for some dynamic change in the pitiable plight of agricultural India. About this

time, in March 1951, Acharya Vinoba Bhave humbly set out from his *ashram* towards Hyderabad, on a peace mission, not himself yet knowing that he was at the outset of an amazing movement that would bring hope at last to the exhausted workers on the land.

The first Five Year Plan is now ending its term,* and there have undoubtedly been significant changes in the country's rural economy during the period ending in 1956. The output of food grains has almost certainly bettered the original estimate. The Community Development Programme, the Irrigation and Hydro-electric projects, the National Extension Service, all promise within measurable time to raise the living standard of the country people. But the landless worker is still forgotten by the State. The government admits that if agricultural production is to be increased, the present unit of land management must be enlarged. Yet no measures have been taken, or even suggested, for a real change in land management and operation. Small farmers are to be encouraged to join co-operatives for credit, purchasing and marketing. But the small farmer remains small—little progress has been made on consolidating holdings—and the landless labourer remains landless. The recent Rural Credit Survey tells a sorry story of increasing indebtedness on the land. The bleak agricultural landscape of 1951 is thus still unchanged as the Bhoodan movement marches across it. The challenge then is the challenge now. To Vinoba Bhave the trouble was that Congress could not serve the people because the principle of service had "become a joke for Congress." He saw the Socialists as "a better lot," but vitiated because they sought power. Vinoba found only the *Sarvodaya Samaj* (Fellowship for the Good of ALL), founded in Wardha by Gandhiji's disciples, fit

* As the proofs of this book are passing through the press the Second Five Year Plan has come into operation.

to meet the challenge. The Fellowship seeks neither power nor profit, but preaches love and a new social order. It has, in Vinoba's belief, the answer not only in India but in all countries where society admits gross inequalities of wealth and denies opportunity to millions. It provides the only answer; the alternative is chaos.

Chapter Two

THE ANSWER—BHOODAN

TO GANDHIJI and his dedicated disciples the independence of India declared on August 15, 1947, was not the independence of his dream. Twenty-five years earlier, at the start of his historic march to the sea in defiance of the imposition of the salt tax, he had left his Sabarmati *ashram* with a vow never to return until complete independence had been won. He never foresaw that, as the price payable for independence, the country would be split into two and its unity destroyed. The flight of thousands of panic-stricken people from one part of the country to another, the disturbances, the arson, the murders, the rapes and other atrocities and the outbursts of bestiality in man that followed the partition lacerated his heart. For him independence was to be the stepping stone to higher things and to an ideal social order. The one essential condition for winning the right to freedom was non-violence. But the independence achieved in 1947 was preceded and immediately followed by violence. How could he reconcile himself to it?

During the days of utter confusion and disorder that followed the partition of the country, the disillusioned leader of the struggle for freedom wandered about on foot from one disturbed area to another in the vain hope of creating order out of chaos and of establishing communal harmony. It reminded one of the wayside preacher who walked barefoot the hard roads of Galilee to preach his gospel of universal love, peace and goodwill. Like that inspired Teacher he too died the death

of a martyr. His chosen apostle, Vinobaji, also a philosopher, saw in the martyrdom of Gandhiji a challenge to himself and his colleagues to band together in order to preach his gospel of human brotherhood and universal benevolence, and to create the ideal social order which he had named *Sarvodaya.* It was for them to pick up the thread of Gandhiji's work where he had left it.

Several of the adherents of Bapu, as Gandhiji was lovingly called by his followers, had for some time before the catastrophe felt the need for an exchange of ideas and for fresh planning to spread the Sarvodaya ideal in the new independent India. They had decided, in consultation with Gandhiji, to hold a Conference early in February 1948 at Wardha, the little town in which Gandhiji had made his headquarters. All the arrangements had been made. Bapu had consented to attend, but two days before he was to leave Delhi for Wardha, he was assassinated. His disciples lost their leader, but not their determination to continue his work.

It is interesting to note that the inspiration for the ideal social order came to Gandhiji from Ruskin. He tells us in his Autobiography that during his student days he read little outside text books. After he launched into active life he had very little time for reading. He believed, however, that he did not lose much, as he could digest thoroughly what little he did read. One of the books he read and re-read was *Unto This Last.* "It brought about," he says, "an instantaneous and practical transformation in my life." Later he translated it into Gujerati and coined for its title the word *Sarvodaya,* the Total Good of All.

What impressed Gandhiji most was Ruskin's dictum that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all. Two other principles enunciated by Ruskin, he says, were quite new and had never occurred to him before. A lawyer's work has the same value as that of a barber, inas-

much as both have the same right to earn a livelihood from their work. A life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living. He at once resolved to reduce those principles to practice. His ambition, after the attainment of Swaraj for the motherland, was to dedicate the remaining days of his life to the creation of a Sarvodaya society, the ideal order of his dream.

On March 13, about five hundred active workers attended the Conference. There were two main problems before them—the necessity of setting up "an organisation that would best serve and continue Gandhiji's line of action and thought," and the ways and means to maintain various Gandhian organisations already established. Babu Rajendra Prasad, later to become India's first President, sounded a note of warning. History was packed with instances of saints whose followers reduced their teachings to dogmas, obligatory to the faithful but quickly becoming empty of meaning. For believers in Gandhiji there must be no "text book of generalisations and dogmas." More especially there must be no organisation which might tend to decline into a sect. Dr. Rajendra Prasad voiced the feelings of the conference. For the followers of the Gandhian path there was to be no official membership of any organisation, no official hierarchy, no subscription, no rules. Conscience alone would tell them whether they were following in the master's steps.

It was at Vinoba's instance that the Conference resolved to form the *Sarvodaya Samaj,* a brotherhood that would strive to create a society based on truth and non-violence, without caste or religious discrimination, with faces set against the exploitation of man. There was to be no membership of the fellowship: those who belonged to it must simply believe. To give direction to the work of the

brotherhood, an executive body was elected, known as *Serv Seva Sangh.*

For two years the work of the fellowship was mainly experimental. For Vinobaji, living in Wardha and its surrounding *ashrams,* those were years of deep meditation and practical experiment. Early in March 1951, on the eve of the brotherhood's third anniversary, *Serv Seva Sangh* workers met at Sevagram to draw up an agenda for the third session of the *Sarvodaya Samaj.* The meeting was to be held in Shivarampalli. They asked Vinobaji to lead the conference, but he seemed disinclined to accept. He was deeply involved in experiments in village autonomy and self-reliance. When the disheartened committee explained that he was their natural and therefore essential leader, Vinobaji sought inspiration, as he often did, in spinning. Later, in the course of his evening prayer meeting, he announced that he would leave his *ashram* on the morning of March 8, and would walk to Shivarampalli. The decision changed Vinoba's life history; it may yet reshape the face of India. This was the first step in the long march towards the social revolution to which Vinobaji had dedicated himself.

Before dawn on the 7th of March, he was already walking the nine miles to his *ashram* at Paunar. There, during that evening's prayer, he told the gathering of his decision to go to Hyderabad, and appealed to all of them, while he was away, to continue to prepare for the great work that was ahead. In the small hours of the next morning, after the usual prayer, Vinobaji left his home determined, as was shown by later events, not to return to it until the problem of the Indian landless labourer was solved to his satisfaction. He had made up his mind to attack the tragedy of Indian society at its root, which was land hunger and the consequent degradation of millions of

men. First, all men had to be shown that the lure of wealth was an illusion. If India could be made to understand that, Vinobaji felt that he would be lifting a corner of the curtain on *Samyayogi* society—his name for the ideal social order, a word he borrowed from the Bhagavad Gita, teaching us to do unto others as we do unto ourselves.

His companions on that historic march were Shrimati Mahadevitai, a life-long devotee of Gandhism, Shrimati Madalsa Agarwal, daughter of the great patriot Seth Jamanlal Bajaj, Vinobaji's devoted secretary, Shri Damodardas Mundada, and two of his old pupils, Sri Dattoba Dastane and Sri Bhau Panse. They were accompanied by two bullocks, yoked to a cart driven by Pandurang, an untouchable, or *harijan,* the bullocks and the man together being a symbol of the problems weighing on Vinobaji's mind. Each man and woman carried a bundle of clothes and a spinning wheel. They needed nothing more. The saint setting out on a pilgrimage does not pause to wonder who will provide for him.

At about 7 a.m. on March 8th, the party reached the Laximinaryan temple in Wardha—the unofficial spiritual centre for Gandhian workers whose *ashrams* are in and around the town. There Vinobaji made a short speech, urging those who had come to meet him never to relax, but to regard each hour as the last chance of working on the task in hand.

Thirty days later, having covered 315 miles, the party arrived at Shivarampalli. Vinobaji had been walking continuously through the districts of Wardha and Yednal in Madhya Pradesh, of Adilabad, Nizamabad and of Hyderabad in Hyderabad State. As he walked, he found himself thinking more and more clearly; and as he talked to the villagers on the way he understood more and more fully their desperate plight.

The daily routine was a journey of twelve miles, beginning at three in the morning. Vinobaji walked briskly, averaging about four miles an hour. There would be a light breakfast (a cupful of curds for Vinobaji), and then at about nine a.m. a halt for the day in some village where he would quietly absorb information about the living conditions of the villagers. At 5 p.m. evening prayers began, and were attended by those attracted from the neighbourhood through which he had walked that day. After prayers, Vinobaji would discourse briefly on the gospel of work and self-help, impressing on his audience that there could be no real freedom without absolute love of one man for another. Often he spoke of village self-government: "When you, men and women of the village, learn to work together to produce your daily needs you will be able to create your own rule, known as *gram raj*. Your rule will be self-government when your village is self-reliant and stands on its own feet. . . . The fight for independence is over. But an even tougher fight, that for village self-government and self-sufficiency, is the call for the morrow. The fight we offer is non-violent; it is a fight that cannot be postponed. All of you, brothers and sisters, will be soldiers in it. Our weapons will be the spinning wheel and the ploughshare. For our battle we need neither guns nor bombs, only tools that are fit for work."

Arrived at Shivarampalli, Vinobaji opened the Conference by suggesting that all members of the brotherhood should take to agriculture, find faith in manual labour, and run their institutions without money (the Sevagram *ashram* had already resolved to do without money from the beginning of 1952). In addition to agriculture he stressed four principal methods of work: (i) the creation of a "peace force." Workers should go out into the countryside and give villagers practical advice, explaining the spirit of Sarvodaya. (ii) contribution of yarn. The spin-

ning wheel and spindle should find their way into every home, so that every family could offer one hank of home-spun yarn on each anniversary of Gandhiji's death. (iii) The elimination of the service of the untouchable scavenger. *Sarvodaya* workers should, to set an example, do the scavenger's job themselves, educate people to keep their homes and surroundings clean and to use refuse for manure. (iv) The practice of the "Honest Life Movement," as the spiritual side of *Sarvodaya.*

In another speech Vinobaji made three proposals for relieving poverty. Agricultural wages, he said, should be paid in kind; land revenue should be realised in kind; and the government should supply people with the cloth that they lacked. At present, he said, the mills of India could not annually supply more than 11 yards per head of the total population, whereas 16 yards was the minimum needed. On another occasion he spoke of economic equality. "We in India," he said, "are taught that our duty is compassion, and our aim equality. But 'absolute equality' has always remained an individual objective, and has never before been tried on a mass scale." It appeared that Vinobaji was advocating the mass salvation of society, through the Hindu ideal of union with God (Brahma). The community as a single unit was to be the believer, not individuals within the community. He put forward this novel idea, but warned that it could not possibly be quickly achieved. Man had taken thousands of years to develop the quality of compassion; if people were to move without care and consideration, another age might be wasted before that quality was re-discovered.

On the last day of the conference there was a heated debate among *Sarvodaya* workers about the extent to which they might take part in politics. Vinobaji resolved the argument in typical manner. "Our prayer to the Lord should be," he said, "'Grant me, O Lord, that I

should follow my advice myself, and on no one else should its burden be imposed.'" Then came an entirely unexpected announcement. On his way back to Wardha Vinobaji told the gathering that he intended to tour the Telengana area, in Hyderabad State, where the communists had forcibly seized land in certain districts, had vigorously injected their propaganda, and were controlling the villages by a rule of appalling terror. Those who were close to Vinobaji as he spoke say that there was excitement in his manner, a flash in his eye, which told them at once that this was no ordinary pilgrimage for their leader. They already knew, of course, that Vinobaji had long wanted to visit the terrorised area of Telengana and to bring to it his message of peace.

Hyderabad was a grim example of the inequalities that Vinobaji abhorred. When the British left India, the Nizam of Hyderabad, unlike other princely rulers, delayed coming to an agreement with the new Congress Government in Delhi. The Nizam himself owned 5 million acres of land, and barely a thousand families controlled almost the entire wealth of his state. Conditions in the poorer districts were as pitiful as those around the wealthy estates. At Balapalle village Vinobaji found a population of 3,000 living on a cultivable area of 3,000 acres. These 3,000 acres belonged to 90 families, whilst 600 families were landless. After Independence Day, August 15, 1947, while the Nizam manœuvred in an attempt to preserve the independence of his state, armed communist bands entered the Telengana villages, which were remote from the capital and were mostly sited in arid forest and scrub lands. Ordering the villagers to gather round, the communists explained that henceforth all land would belong to the people. No rent was to be paid to landlords; all debts were to be cancelled. The landless were entitled to seize the property of the rich, and they should resist all attempts

to re-establish the old order. In over 1000 villages landlords and agents of the Nizam were brutally attacked; there were over 500 murders in the first few months. At the height of this rural chaos the Indian Army crossed the Hyderabad border and the Nizam yielded to its demand that his state should become part of the Indian Union. The Indian Army switched its attack from the Nizam's forces to the communists in Telengana, who at once mobilised for guerrilla warfare in a terrain ideally suited to it. Communist violence was inevitably answered by government violence. When Vinobaji entered Telengana, the communists still retained to a great extent their grip on the people.

"The rich have fathered the communists," was Vinobaji's opinion. No police or militia could cure the sickness. The only way to root out the communist menace was "to remove the dreadful disparity in the distribution of property in a peaceful way."

Vinobaji had left Shivarampalli before dawn on April 15th, the day which is dedicated to Lord Ram, from whom he obtained blessings before he set out. After two halts, he reached Panchampalli, a notorious stronghold of the communists, on April 18th. He made his customary tour round the village, and in the untouchable quarter he went into a hut and played with a tiny baby he found lying on a mat. The mother was extravagantly grateful that a holy man should hold her child. By the time he came out of the hut a crowd of untouchables had gathered; they began, in their practised whine, the usual melancholy tale of poverty. Vinobaji asked them to see him in the afternoon, and by one p.m., the hottest hour of the sweltering day, a large crowd had gathered at his camp. The whole history of individual miseries began again. "Maharaj, there can be no peace in this village

while so many cannot eat. If only we had land for cultivation, our sorrows would lighten."

"How much land do you want?" asked Vinobaji.

The peasants hesitated. There was the usual reluctance to be the one to make a decision. After a prolonged whispering among the old men, someone said: "Eighty acres."

Vinobaji did not speak at once; he was looking at the dusty earth in meditation. Then he raised his eyes and asked whether among the good people sitting round him there were any owners of land. A few moved their heads in acknowledgment. "Brothers," asked Vinobaji, "are there some among you who will give land to your brothers, so that they may not die of starvation? They need only eighty acres."

Once more silence, this time anxious and intense. Then a landowner stood up and came to the front of the crowd. He spoke gently, unboastingly: "I offer one hundred acres of land as a gift."

This was India, where to millions ownership of land is the sole earthly ambition. Vinobaji can be excused for seeming cautious; the offer seemed too good to be true. He met the man's gaze, and asked him to repeat what he had said. Sri V. R. Reddy, the landowner who had sprung the surprise, answered firmly: "I will give away one hundred acres. If people here do not believe what I say, I will make a written declaration here and now."

Vinobaji continued to act with the caution he always enjoined on his followers. He dissolved the meeting and asked everyone to come back at the time of evening prayer. As the crowd shuffled away through the dust he again called Sri Reddy, and asked him if he really understood and appreciated what he was doing. He found the landowner unshakable.

Early next morning, before he resumed his march, Vinobaji sent for Sri Reddy for the fourth time to repeat his promise; Reddy, still good-natured, produced a written deed. This first land gift, of April 18, 1951, initiated *Bhoodan,* the land gift movement. From then on, Vinobaji told his followers, he was convinced that God's hand was with him in his task. His belief was confirmed at the very next village, Tongadpalli, where Vinobaji preached on the subject of Sri Reddy's gift, and at once found another landowner in front of him again offering land. Vinobaji now had confidence as well as conviction. In village after village he presented himself as another peasant son. "If you have five sons among whom you are dividing your land, treat me as a sixth, and give me a sixth share." As Vinobaji presented the case, he made the appeal, not for himself, but in the name of God.

It is now time to take the measure of the man who is carrying on his weak shoulders the burden of rural India. What are the roots of his being? What is the stuff that he is made of? What is the innate worth of so singular a personality? A glimpse into his history and way of life will provide the answer.

Chapter Three

SANT VINOBA

ACHARYA VINOBA BHAVE was born on September 11, 1895, at Gagode, in what was then Baroda State. His parents, quiet and devout Chitpavan Brahmins, called him Vinayak. It was Gandhiji who later gave him the name Vinoba.

His family was greatly respected in Gagode. Vinoba's grandfather, Shambhurao, was the village high priest. His father, Narahar, a strict and straightforward man, was a state civil servant, and spent much of his time away from home in the Gaekwar's capital, Baroda. His wife, Rukmini Devi, had therefore much to do with Vinoba's early education. She was one of those high-principled Indian women who firmly guide the household from behind the scenes, an orthodox Brahmin with strong views about applied religion. Even now, when Vinoba appeals for land gifts, he tells a story of his mother's concerning a woman who was giving a Brahmin a four-anna piece concealed in a sweetmeat, thus following the precept that charity should be practised in secret. She could not, however, overcome her pride in her own generosity. "Be careful," she whispered to the Brahmin. "Mind that when you eat the sweetmeat you do not drop the four-anna piece." "Where is the grace in a gift thus bestowed?" Vinoba's mother used to ask her son. "A genuine gift should be made without thought. Do good, but drown the consciousness of it in the river."

From his mother also Vinoba learned that man is not the judge of his fellowmen. Any beggar, able-bodied or

infirm, who appeared at her door was given alms, and Vinoba's youthful quotations from the Gita on the subject of deserving and undeserving were met with the answer: "In my eyes this is God himself, in disguise." It is his mother's teaching, says Vinoba, which now enables him to greet all men without prejudice.

Hymns from the Gita were chanted daily in Vinoba's home, and the sayings of the saints were constantly quoted by his parents and grandparents. The atmosphere of Vinoba's home was thus filled with the presence of the Lord. His grandfather kept perpetually alight the sacred flame as a symbol of God, Who was Himself Eternal Light. For India, at the turn of the century, Vinoba's grandfather, Shambhurao, was no ordinary village priest. The temple which he had built at Wai, and dedicated to Koteshwar Mahadev, was open on the deity's feast-day to *Harijans,* or untouchables, as they were then called. At all religious festivities, Shambhurao insisted on untouchables being served with food, together with other worshippers. He even engaged a Muslim musician to sing holy songs before the altar. "Why," he asked his critics, "should there be differences of race and sect in the house of God?" Unusual enlightenment thus penetrated the religion which filled Vinoba's mind and soul whilst he was a boy.

At the age of ten Vinoba was sent to a primary school at Baroda for two years. For the next three, his father taught him at home, then placed him in Baroda High School. Vinoba was an excellent scholar, but even before he passed his matriculation his main interests began to be centred in subjects outside the school curriculum. His father, who wished him to visit Europe later on, had insisted that he should learn French at school, as a second language to English. His mother, however, had always wanted him to know Sanskrit, since without this he could not read the Hindu scriptures in the original; nor at that

time was there a translation of the Gita in Marathi, the family's native tongue. Vinoba, therefore, learned Sanskrit in his spare time; he devoured the writings and biographies of notable religious and political figures. Of his regular school subjects he liked mathematics best. "Next to God," he has written, "if I love anything best it is mathematics." Later, the precision of numbers seemed to rule Vinoba's life. He abhorred inexactitude of thought or speech; he would accept no statement without definite proof, nor even attempt anything that was not planned on the best available data.

One day, when he was nineteen, Vinoba entered the kitchen in his home, with a roll of papers in his hand. He proceeded to push them into the fire.

"What are you doing?" asked his mother in astonishment.

"Reducing to ashes my school and college papers and examination certificates," replied the son, who had by this time learned to think for himself.

"But you may need them some day," she said.

"No," said Vinoba emphatically, in a tone she heard for the first time. "Now that I have decided to say goodbye to college, they are of no use to me."

His close friends at college, however, were not as surprised as his mother. They knew that his interest in college life had been waning for some time. When they asked him why he was neglecting his studies, the reply was "longing to attain Brahma"—the longing to be one with God and to reduce himself to zero, which subsequently became the passion of his life. Those more intimately associated with him knew that there was another reason too; he felt that there were better ways of preparing for life than by university studies, and many better things to do. Often during discussions in college regarding the best way in which the youth of India could help

the national movement for freedom, Vinoba's friends had discovered who were his heroes. Lokmanya Tilak was then their idol, as being the greatest rebel of his time. Annie Besant, who had unfurled the banner of Home Rule, was another favourite. Aurabindo Ghose was the third inveterate champion of independence. With which of his heroes would Vinoba throw himself into the national struggle?

"Where will you go?" asked one of his companions. "To Lokmanya Tilak or to Annie Besant?"

"I have not the courage to go to Lokmanya, nor the desire to go to Besant Bai."

"Then will you withdraw to a life of contemplation in the Himalayas?"

"No. If one cannot find God in society, there is no chance of finding Him in the Himalayas."

He would tell none of his companions what he had in mind. He had in fact already decided to leave college and home, but at that time he was due to sit for his Intermediate examination, and he was boy enough not to be able to nerve himself to tell his stern and practical father. A couple of days before the examinations were due to be held in Bombay, he boarded a Bombay train at Baroda with his friend Gopalrao Kale. At Surat, en route, he left the train after handing to Kale a letter for his father, with instructions not to post it until the examinations were over. From Surat, Vinoba set out for the holy city of Benares.

His father was naturally upset when he received Vinoba's letter. He, however, took no steps to bring his son back, believing that the difficulties he would run up against would eventually force him to return home. But Rukmini Devi, who knew her son better, gave him up as lost to her forever. "Once he has made up his mind," she said, "he will stick to his decision, come what may."

At Benares, Vinoba threw himself into the study of Sanskrit and of Vedic literature. Fresh in his mind was his mother's idea that he should translate the Gita into Marathi. But his work suffered because of a succession of illnesses. Benares was a city of *pandits*, or learned men. But more conspicuous than learning was the stench and filth of the streets and the utter lack of sanitation. Vinoba's health wilted in these surroundings, but loss of weight and vitality bothered him no more than lack of comfort had ever done. His serious worry was his disillusionment with Benares. The prevailing sanctimoniousness, the strict formality of religion, and the pretensions of holiness, depressed him. He could find no spirit to inspire him, nor could he break through the city's polished façade of religiosity. He was face to face with worse disappointment than his father had ever visualised for him.

The Hindu University of Benares was at that time to be inaugurated by the Viceroy. Princes and men of learning from all over India had been invited for the ceremony, as was Gandhiji. Vinoba had never seen the little lawyer, who had just returned from his South African "campaign of non-violence" on behalf of the Indian settlers. Gandhiji, who had been asked to say a few words at Benares, chose the occasion, as indeed he was to choose most occasions, to make a political speech. Around him on the platform were gaudy representatives of wealth and power in India, conflicting—it seemed to him—with the serene atmosphere of learning. He asked the rulers and high officials present to think of the millions who lived in perpetual poverty, and to use their wealth to lighten the suffering of their fellow creatures. Referring to the police and plain-clothes men he had seen at every corner of the city, he asked, "Why should those who rule be afraid of the people? Where is the need for so large a police force if they know how to keep a docile people content?" He

emphasised, however, that sneak attacks and haphazard bomb throwing were not the ways to defeat imperialism. "If we do not want the British to remain in this country, let us tell them openly and frankly to go back to their own country. If for such plain speaking we are sentenced to death, let us go cheerfully to the gallows."

Mrs. Annie Besant was in the chair. Herself an ardent worker for Indian nationalism, she nevertheless thought that a political speech was an abuse of the invitation extended to Gandhiji. She asked him to conclude. The crowd yelled for him to continue. Mrs. Besant left the platform, followed by all the dignitaries present, and the meeting finally dispersed in great excitement.

The affair made a stir in Benares, and it delighted Vinoba. He found himself sparklingly refreshed by Gandhiji's sentiments, by his blend of political aspiration and spiritual ideal. Here, Vinoba felt, both revolution (kranti) and peace (shanti) were to be found. He wrote at once to Gandhiji, expressing both his joyful sympathy and something of his own longings. Gandhiji answered promptly, and Vinoba wrote again, throwing out endless questions. "Such conundrums," came the reely, "as you put forth cannot be solved by correspondence. I would therefore advise you to come to the *ashram* (community) for further discussion."

Vinoba started for the *ashram* at once. On June 7th, 1916, he received his first blessing from Gandhiji, followed by a long heart-to-heart talk. The two men instantly appreciated each other, and Vinoba was admitted to the *ashram* as a full member. He had gone, in all humility, to do no more than listen and learn, but at the discussions that followed the evening prayers, he could not remain a silent observer. It was not in his nature. As he began to put questions and to quote authorities, several

members of the *ashram* found that they already had something to learn too from this twenty-year-old youth.

Gandhiji watched the progress of his new disciple with keen pleasure. Vinoba weighed barely 98 pounds. All day, without any sign of fatigue, he would cheerfully draw water from the deep well in the grounds.

"How can you do it with so weak a body?" asked Gandhiji.

"With the will to work," answered Vinoba laconically.

The friendship between teacher (*guru*) and novice (*chela*) ripened rapidly. Gandhiji discovered that Vinoba had not told his parents what he had been doing since he left home, and wrote to Narahar: "Your son, Vinoba, is with me. At a tender age he has acquired a degree of spirituality and asceticism that took me years of patient labour to attain." Daily Gandhiji and Vinoba ground corn together, cleaned out latrines, studied the philosophy of the Vedanta and other religious literature, and learnt to appreciate one another more and more. "He is one of the few pearls in the *ashram*," said Gandhiji one day to his famous English associate, C. F. Andrews. "These few do not come like others to be blessed by the *ashram*, but to bless it."

Vinoba in his humility saw things differently. "Though Gandhiji said that Vinoba had gone to the *ashram* to give and not to receive," wrote Mahadeo Desai in *Young India*; "this is what Vinobaji said in a talk: 'Only I can know what I have got in the *ashram*. It was an early ambition of mine to distinguish myself by some violent deed in the service of the country. But Bapu cured me of that ambition. It is he who has extinguished the volcano of anger and other passions in me. I have been progressing every day of my life in the *ashram*.'"

Certainly Vinoba's early history does not show him as a

humble youth. He had, and occasionally still has, difficulty in controlling his self-will and his intolerance of pretenders. His mother helped him greatly, but his life in the *ashram* taught him to be the real master of his emotions and to efface himself. Mahadeo Desai wrote in 1917: "You may stay days and days with him without knowing him, and even when you know him, you only begin to know him. You meet with a reserve which you cannot easily break. He does not talk much, and rarely does he say anything about himself. And yet if you could get to the bottom of his profound depths, you would be sure to exclaim, 'Nowhere have I struck such treasures!'"

Vinoba's health, undermined at Benares, gained nothing from the spartan discipline he imposed upon himself in the *ashram.* He was soon compelled to take a year's leave of absence, during which he continued furiously to pursue his Sanskrit studies. Half his leave period was spent at Wai, in the shadow of his grandfather's temple; there he studied under the famous scholar Narayan Shastri Marathe. For the remaining six months he walked through the countryside as an itinerant teacher. His reading in Sanskrit was so intensive that he was able to write to Gandhiji, in February 1918: "Now I no longer desire to seek anybody else's help to study ancient literature."

Meanwhile Vinoba set about restoring his health, but not through rest or medicine. "To improve my health," he wrote in another letter, "I began by walking ten to twelve miles, then ground twelve to sixteen pounds of grain." "For the first six months I took salt, then gave it up. No spices. After many experiments I came to know that one cannot do without milk. Nevertheless, I wished to give it up. For one month I lived on bananas, lemons and milk only. I lost strength. Now my food consists of milk, three pounds of bread, four or five bananas and a

lemon when available. Total daily cost, eleven pice (3¾d)."

Among the activities he mentions: "Classes for free instruction to pupils, in Hindi, in Gita, and the Upanishads." Also "taught English to two pupils." "Travelled about four hundred miles on foot. During the journey gave talks on Gita."

"At Wai, I started a study circle and established a reading room. To get funds for the reading room I conducted a corn-grinding class. Fifteen students were with me, grinding wheat and other corn. Many of them were high-school students. The price for grinding four pounds was fixed at one pice (¼d) only. During the two months the class was conducted we earned enough money to buy books for the reading room."

"Even in dreams," he added, "one and only one earnest desire dominates my thought. Will God make me an instrument of service to Him? That you may write to me in your own hand is the earnest prayer of your son Vinoba, who looks upon you as his revered father."

Reading his letter, Bapu exclaimed: "He is a Bhim (Hercules)!" And he immediately answered Vinoba: "I do not know what epithet to use in respect of you. Your love and character overwhelm me. I am not competent to judge you. You have tested yourself and I accept your judgment as mine. You come very near fulfilling my expectations of you. I accept the position of father, as you ask. I hold that a truthful father produces a more truthful son than himself. . . . You have scrupulously kept the *ashram* observances even while you are out of it. . . . May God give you long life. . . . May He make you an instrument of service to Hind! That is my prayer. . . ."

One year later, almost precisely to the hour, Vinoba returned to the *ashram*. About this punctuality Gandhiji

said: "It showed your fidelity to truth." "Rather," answered Vinoba, "was it my loyalty to mathematics." "Can mathematics ever betray truth?" asked Bapu.

Vinoba slipped back naturally into the life of *ashram*. He began teaching in the national school, as well as giving outside lectures. It was now the winter of 1918-19. The post-war epidemic of virulent influenza struck India like a typhoon. The disease did not pass by Gagode, and Vinoba rushed home to find that his mother, father and younger brother were all victims. While his father was slowly recovering, his mother died; even in the midst of this intimate tragedy, Vinoba found it necessary to stand up for his beliefs. He opposed, on principle, the hiring of a professional to chant at his mother's funeral, but he lost his argument in the face of tradition and of scandalised relatives. He then refused to take part in the ceremony. While others wailed round his mother's funeral pyre, he stayed at home reciting verses of the Gita and the Upanishads.

On April 6, 1921, Vinoba left Gandhiji's *ashram* for Wardha. An enlightened millionaire, Jamnalal Bajaj, had started a branch of this *ashram* at Wardha, and Bapu wished Vinoba to take charge of it. With him went his friend Dhotre, and five of the students he had been teaching in the national school. At Wardha, Vinoba settled down to work to the point of exhaustion, as he had done before. For instance, he started a Marathi monthly magazine in which he wrote every word of its forty-eight pages himself.

Just over two years later Vinoba went to gaol for the first time. He had taken part in the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha non-violent campaign for truth, and the publicity given to his arrest told the people of India for the first time that this quiet devotee of Gandhiji's *ashram* was also a political rebel. Vinoba treated the

prison authorities with wild contempt. To some visiting friends he remarked: "You have seen a circus, haven't you? There men command and control animals. In gaol it's just the reverse. Here animals command and control men."

From Nagpur, Vinoba and his friend Dhotre, who had been arrested with him, were transferred to Akola, where they found the political prisoners refusing to work. Vinoba gently snubbed their righteous indignation. To take food without working, he said, was not merely unlawful, it was a sin. Moreover, prison life provided an excellent opportunity to learn some useful manual craft. Very soon the warders were both perplexed and relieved to see their truculent charges settling down to work obediently under Vinoba's direction. Less than two months after his arrest Vinoba was released, on September 10, 1923. He resumed work at the *ashram* at Wardha as though nothing had happened. There was an interlude when Bapu sent him to Travancore in the far south to supervise a non-co-operation movement at Wachrom on behalf of untouchables wishing to enter the temple. Then he returned to Wardha to launch a scheme of village service covering about 300 villages in the sub-district. Vinoba organised the division of tasks among his students and fellow workers, himself working simultaneously as farmer, spinner, weaver, teacher and scavenger.

For the next eight years Vinoba pursued with steady passion his ideas for village improvement. In 1931, Gandhiji was persuaded by the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, to attend the London Round Table Conference, which was an attempt to resolve the deadlock between India's nationalists and the British Government. Gandhiji returned empty-handed; soon he and many of the Congress leaders were once more in gaol. Vinoba sensed the fear that clutched at the hearts of the Indian people when they saw

their champions arrested without hope, and he therefore momentarily re-entered the political arena. Speaking at a mass meeting at Jalgaon he stressed the need for self-respect, self-help and fearlessness. He went on to prophesy that British rule could not long survive in India, whereupon he in his turn was arrested. This time he was imprisoned at Dhulia for six months, after which he returned as buoyantly as ever to his work of service to his country. He was at pains to see that he was not regarded as a popular hero. People, he said, were fond nowadays of talking in terms of the great Hindu epic, the *Ramayana,* visualising the British raj as demon-god Ravana, and the various national leaders as the heroes who fought against that spirit of evil. "I say to myself, what role is there for me in this Ramayana? The example of Ahalya turning herself into stone suggests itself. I should be blest, thrice blest, if I were to become that stone."

Vinoba left dramatisation to others. Dedicated though he was to the task of securing his country's independence, his first concern was to make himself fit for that independence. This could only be achieved by implicit obedience to Gandhiji. In one of the introductory couplets to his Marathi translation of his master's *Mangal Prabhat,* he wrote: "Vinya is like the non-existent zero of mathematics. The master is one and unique whose value grows by addition of zeros."*

Towards the end of 1932, Gandhiji moved Vinoba to Nalwadi. "Wardha *ashram* will soon complete the twelfth year of its existence," Vinoba wrote to Bapu. "Experiences have been good. . . . But for your behest I would not have lived here so long. With me nothing counts in this world except your blessings. I may say that it has been my constant endeavour during these twelve years to observe the vows. Yet I have found many failings in

* *Vinoba and His Mission,* p.12.

myself. . . . I know your blessings are ever there to cover me, and yet I write this letter seeking them. . . ." Bapu replied: "Your love and faith fill my eyes with tears of joy. . . . You will be an instrument of great service."

After five more years of selfless labour among the villagers, Vinoba moved in 1937 from Nalwadi to Paunar. He still worked in the background, but as the Indian people became increasingly proud of Congress and its struggle for independence, they began also to learn more about the personalities who were the real life of the movement. To himself, but only to himself, Vinoba remained a nobody. By 1939, Gandhiji's loving respect for him was known throughout nationalist India. The beginning of 1939 saw something of a truce between Congress and the British administration. For the first time, Congress ministries were functioning in several provinces; the country was warmed by a glimmer of goodwill. All this, however, ended abruptly in September, when the Viceroy in Council declared war against Germany on India's behalf, without even making the gesture of consulting the popular ministries. Whether this omission was prompted by fear of a Congress refusal or was just a plain blunder, it had the worst possible effect on Indian nationalists, almost none of whom had any sympathy for Hitler. Gandhiji immediately announced an individual civil disobedience campaign, in which selected national leaders would ostentatiously defy the government. For the chosen, it would be a greater honour than ever to go to gaol. As leader of this serious challenge to the government, Gandhiji chose Vinoba, designating him as India's first individual exponent of non-co-operation at that time.

By the following morning, the newspapers had made this slight ascetic figure a national champion. Announcing his choice, Gandhiji had issued one of the most singular press releases ever to publicise a popular figure: "He has

taken part in every menial activity of the *ashram* from scavenging to cooking. Though he has a marvellous memory and is a student by nature, he has devoted the largest part of his time to spinning, in which he has specialised as have few others. He believes in universal spinning as the central activity which will remove poverty from the villages. Being a born teacher he has been of the utmost assistance to Asha Devi in her development of the scheme of education through handicraft. It is original in its conception. He has made scoffers realise that spinning is the handicraft par excellence which lends itself effectively to basic education. He has revolutionised spinning and drawn out its hitherto unknown possibilities. For perfect spinning he probably has no rival in India.

"He has abolished every trace of untouchability from his heart. He believes in communal unity with the same passion as I. In order to know the best minds of Islam he gave one year to the study of the Koran in the original. . . . He found this necessary in order to cultivate living contacts with the Muslims in his neighbourhood.

"He has an army of disciples and workers who would rise to any sacrifice at his bidding. He is responsible for producing a young man who has dedicated himself to the service of lepers, and who is now running several clinics for their care. Hundreds owe their cure to his labours. He has now published a handbook in Marathi for the treatment of lepers. . . .

"He believes in the necessity for the political independence of India. He is an accurate student of history. But he believes that real independence of the villagers is impossible without the constructive programme of which home-spun cloth (*Khadi*) is the centre. He believes that the spinning wheel (*charkha*) is the most equitable outward symbol of that non-violence which has become an integral part of his life. He has taken an active part in the previous

civil disobedience campaigns. He has never been in the limelight on the political platform. And he thoroughly believes that non-violent resistance is impossible without heartfelt belief in and practice of constructive work."

Vinoba was obediently disobedient, and he served a light sentence of three months simple imprisonment. (The second leader on Bapu's list was Jawaharlal Nehru, but before he could offer non-violent disobedience he was convicted and sentenced to four years rigorous imprisonment.) Vinoba completed his term, and at once repeated his offence and went back to gaol for six months. The third time he courted arrest he was sentenced to a year in prison.

He had been free for only a few months when the "Quit India" campaign of 1942 threw his country into the worst crisis of the war. Vinoba was detained without trial on August 9, and kept in detention for almost three years. During his period in the central gaol at Vellore, in South India, he learned from fellow prisoners the four great languages of the South—Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada.

The indignity and inconvenience of prison life hardly touched Vinoba. It is typical that when he was released from Senoi gaol in July 1945 he was shocked, during his train journey back to Wardha, to see the villagers on his route making their usual morning excursion to the railway track, and fouling it. This was enough to start him on a new scavenging drive from the *ashram*. He himself became the official scavenger in the nearby village of Surgaon, and every day he did scavenging work wherever he was until Gandhiji's death, when his new responsibilities left him little time for such menial duties.

In April 1948, Vinoba set out on a peace pilgrimage with the object of learning at first hand the problems of the refugees who had flooded into India after the partition

of the country. Once more his health broke down, and once more he sought a cure in manual labour. Working vigorously in the fields for eight to ten hours every day, he aimed not only at developing his physique and improving his health, but also at creating a self-sufficient economy, without money, among those around him. For three years, until April 1953, his *ashram* workers apparently existed happily without using any money at all. Then they were called away by their leader for more important things. For by then Vinoba was at the height of his Bhoodan campaign, and needed every available worker to help him on his gigantic tour of Bihar.

Chapter Four

ON TO THE CITY OF GOD!

NEWS OF HOLINESS spreads in India faster than the monsoon clouds. Vinobaji was quite unknown as a man in Telengana. He had spent most of his adult life as a farm labourer, spinner or scavenger in the villages around Wardha, in the heart of Madhya Pradesh. Yet in Tongadpalli, the Telengana village where he received his second gift of land, he was able to settle a feud between two land-owning brothers that had split the population into factions for years. He left the brothers embracing each other. In India, the recognition of true holiness can produce remarkable acts of contrition. The whole village, as the result of the settlement, was permeated with a spirit of healing and goodwill. Such was Vinoba's gift to the village in return for land given for the glory of God.

As he toured Nalgonda and Warangal, the barren districts that were the seedbed of Telengana communism, peasants thronged to receive his blessing. Most of them were illiterate. Apart from the struggle of daily living they knew little except their religion. Vinobaji, therefore, talked to them in terms of religion that they could understand, using religion to illustrate his points in a way that would sometimes be impossible in most countries of the west. "In the past, when the nation was troubled, our ancestors used to offer sacrifices. I also want to make a sacrifice, so I have started this experiment of *bhoodan,* or the giving of land. Just as we partake in sacrificial ceremonies, so we should present land to the landless poor. People often say that no one is charitable during the

Kaliyug (the evil era in the Hindu cycle). But when there is someone who asks others to give, they give." Vinobaji went on to say, in the simplest words, that all land, all property, and all wealth should be used for the good of everybody. Only Vishnu can be lord of Lakshmi (goddess of the earth); landlords to-day have usurped his position. It has been said that Lakshmi is our mother . . . but to-day we have set ourselves up as her lord. I feel that this is an injustice and a denial of religion." Vinobaji never omitted, however, the practical message: "There is a limit to the amount of land available, and the population is growing every day. We must therefore dig new wells and construct new canals in order to irrigate the land. The possession of land by the peasant, without the existence of cottage industries, will not solve his problems. When the peasant takes to producing finished goods from the raw materials available in the villages, then only will he save himself. "The communists do a great deal to serve the poor." While admitting this, however, Vinobaji filled in the whole picture. "The communists have indulged in violence and murder. This is absolutely wrong, and therefore all their services count as nothing. . . . It is my earnest wish to make people understand that the way of peace is the real way to serve the masses." He recalled how Gandhiji had said that he was a communist in the sense of serving the people, but that he would not accept the suicidal path of violence. Vinoba himself went further. In an appeal at Wyara he undertook to accompany the communists, provided that they abandoned violence, in order to promote a spirit of true communal sharing.

Three months later the Communist Party of India decided to abandon violence in Telengana. The government released those communists who were still in gaol so that they could take part in India's first general elections. In the Hyderabad State Assembly, the CPI won 42 seats, the

Congress Party 85. Most of the communist candidates were returned from the Telengana districts, where the peasants had had a taste of terrorism and did not dare to vote against them. The new Congress government in Hyderabad quickly decided to initiate radical land reforms, abolishing absentee landlordism and fixing a limit on holdings based on the fertility of the soil.

Vinobaji walked in Telengana for fifty-one days, stopping at a different village every night and passing through about 200 villages altogether. He spoke to over 200,000 people, and it is estimated that he settled 500 disputes. He received 12,201 acres in land gifts, and left behind him a committee to arrange for its distribution. Vinoba himself was now satisfied that he had the right answer to the stresses and sorrows of peasant life; he had so often found it simple to restore goodwill where before there had been bad blood; he was no longer worried by the problem of how to redistribute land without creating bad feeling or encouraging the violent methods of communism.

Vinobaji arrived back at Paunar *ashram* on June 27, 1951, to find his admirers praising him for having worked miracles. He quickly damped down their adulation. What had been achieved was the result of goodwill to which everyone had contributed. His disciples should think clearly and feel deeply, and promote goodwill by the sincerity of their thoughts, words and deeds. He wanted especially to avoid any suggestion that there was some magic trick that would cure the country's ills. At the same time he was certain that his was the only solution, and he was distressed at how little, according to his estimate, the authorities were doing to relieve rural poverty. Soon after his return to Paunar, he was visited by Shri R. K. Patil, an old friend and a member of the National Planning Commission. He showed Vinobaji a draft report of India's first Five Year Plan for his comment. Vinoba made his

criticisms plain. "In the Constitution you promise food and work to all citizens. But the Government seems to have totally forgotten this assurance. If you, on whose shoulders lies the responsibility to provide work for all, find it impossible to do so, you must resign. . . . You ask village industries to support themselves. You first cut off my feet and then want me to stand. . . . Village industries did not die of their own accord, they have been deliberately killed. . . . Why don't you realise that if Gandhiji could do so much in those unfavourable days, we should be able to do much more . . .?

"You took a pledge to acquire self-sufficiency in food by 1951. When you find that unrealisable, you start a Planning Commission which says that self-sufficiency is well-nigh impossible. . . . Do you ever think what would happen to your country if a war broke out? You propose to import 3 million tons of food. Have we any ancestral property to sell in order to buy it outright . . .? Yours is a plan involving perpetual begging. . . . It cannot inspire anyone to produce more. . . .

"I can clothe all the country in homespun cloth within two years. If I don't, you can hang me on the scaffold. But it is a different matter altogether if you don't want homespun at all."

The night after this outburst, Vinobaji could not sleep. He had condemned the Five Year Plan for neglecting village production, and he still felt the authorities needed a good shaking up, but had he any concrete alternative to offer? He knew that before the government, in its cool, remote palaces in Delhi, would be prepared to take any serious notice of him he would have to produce large-scale results. Next morning he called together representatives from the various *ashram* institutions around Wardha and appealed to them to concentrate on intensified production in the surrounding villages.

Patil returned to Delhi and reported the result of his talks with Vinobaji to the Prime Minister, who was also chairman of the Planning Commission. Pandit Nehru has always been worried by the conflict between India's industrial needs, if she is to become a modern nation, and the Gandhian aim of rural self-sufficiency. He invited Vinobaji to come to Delhi for consultations. Vinoba replied that he would go on foot to Delhi—nearly 800 miles from his *ashram*—setting out on September 12th, the day after his 56th birthday. At his prayer meeting on the eve of his departure, he referred to comments he had heard about the land gifts he had received in Hyderabad. Critics were saying that it was easy to get the Telengana landlords to give away land because the communists had so terrorised them that they were afraid to go near their property. If this were true, Vinoba said, all hope of the non-violent revolution he sought might as well be abandoned. But he refused to believe it, since to do so would be to ignore the better nature of man, on which he relied. He made no special appeal for land that evening, but landlords present at the meeting, living far from the communist troubles of Telengana, at once contributed 75 acres.

Vinobaji's march to Delhi is already an epic in contemporary Indian history. Villagers crowded along the route to greet him, overwhelming him with garlands and blessings. Vinobaji brushed aside both the flowers and the kind words. "I want land," he would say brusquely. "Who is prepared to give it to me?" A surprising number did so. In the ten days from September 17th to 26th Vinobaji collected over 1¼ million acres from 201 donors in fourteen villages. He was on the top of his form. "Those who do not give land to-day will do so to-morrow," said the prophet of the countryside jubilantly. "They cannot help giving. In India there is no one who would turn down my request for land." He was not being over-

confident, and he made it clear that he claimed no credit for himself: he felt deeply that the people were going to solve their own problems. "I am simply creating the atmosphere. The beginning is always small. When the atmosphere spreads everywhere, someone will only have to ask and another will give. Then there will be no need for me as an intermediary between rich and poor." Asked if there could ever be final solution without the intervention of the government, he replied: "In a democracy the people's will is the government. What the people want the government has to implement."

At Sagar, the university town in the north of Madhya Pradesh, Vinobaji for the first time announced his demand for 50 million acres of land that could be cultivated. It was a five year plan of his own. He hoped, he said, to receive the full total in gifts by the end of 1957. He was supremely sure of his mission, and he asked everyone to contribute his mite to Daridranarayanan, the god of the poor. "Even as I stand here," he said, "I can see the revolution taking place before my eyes."

In their veneration for holy men, people make no distinction between one saint and another. Vinoba was as successful in Muslim as in Hindu areas, though as he proceeded north the women, who had outnumbered the men in his Telengana crowds, tended to keep out of sight behind the *purdah* (veil). At Madhyadu village a Muslim peasant gave him 11 acres, and then begged him to go with him and visit his sick wife. At the family's home a little girl presented, on behalf of her bedridden mother, a further 11½ acres. Vinobaji was delighted. "It is only right," he said to the man, "that your wife, with the heart of a woman, should wish to sacrifice more than you." Although Vinoba's approach was basically Hindu, he could talk to the Muslim not only in the language he knew, but in the parables of the Koran. Throughout the march

Muslim contributions were very encouraging. Villagers everywhere, whether Hindu or Muslim, demonstrated that poor as they were, they had generous hearts.

Across the state border, in Vindhya Pradesh, Vinobaji was less happy. Vindhya Pradesh is a unit made up of former princely states, where before 1947 Gandhiji's words and methods were given short shrift by the authorities. Vinobaji did persuade one group of government servants, a class normally wedded to its chairs and pay-packets, to resign from their posts and become workers for the good of all, but on the whole he was glad to reach the southernmost part of Uttar Pradesh, where lies the town of Jhansi. Uttar Pradesh has produced most of the brains and resources of nationalism both for India and Pakistan, and Jhansi is honoured throughout modern India for the bravery of the Rani Lakshmibai, who fell in battle against the British in 1857. Vinobaji took the opportunity to make some sober observations to the students of Jhansi, since all across India there were disturbing signs of student indiscipline. "You may take part in politics," he said, "but do not join political groupings. Live like lions, not like sheep. Sheep form flocks, lions don't. To-day there are people wishing to impose their views on students." He warned them against those who might encroach upon their reasoning faculties and discernment.

Back over the twisting border, Vinobaji was in the city fort of Gwalior, summer capital of Vindhya Pradesh. There a certain tartness returned to his tone: "It is wrong to assert, 'I own this,' or 'This is mine, that is yours.' Only when the consciousness of ownership dies away will anyone requiring land get it for the asking, then the reign of God will be established." His message was forceful enough to persuade a group of local Rajput landlords, known in history for being as acquisitive as they were brave. "We are convinced," said their leader, "that you

are our friend as well as the friend of the poor. We are Rajputs. As Rajputs we regard it as our duty to donate land. Although not much land has been left to us, we will do all we can to take part in this sacrifice of giving."

Entering Uttar Pradesh once more, Vinobaji drew nearer Delhi. Some of India's best-known poets visited his wayside camps, bringing gifts of their works and of Hindi translations of the Gita. Other Hindi writers promised to do everything possible to spread the message of *bhoodan*. On November 1, amid the climbing temples of Mathura, a conference of *Sarvodaya* workers pledged themselves to collect 500,000 acres of land in Uttar Pradesh. It was another turning-point in the story of the movement. For the first time a group of supporters had set themselves a specific figure to be achieved. By such spontaneous decisions the movement grew. *Bhoodan* has never had a blueprint, only a rough sketch with frequent additions.

Vinobaji arrived at the Indian capital on November 13, after covering 792 miles at the rate of 16 to 18 miles a day. A small hut was erected for him to live in near Gandhiji's memorial, down by the Jumna river in Old Delhi. Vinoba's first words in Delhi on this spot sacred to the memory of Gandhiji were: "I still feel that though his mortal remains are no more, his spirit is with me. Whenever I am about to err he shows me the right way." Vinobaji was now no longer the little-known ascetic; his march on Delhi had been reported daily in the national press. Crowds milled round his small shelter all day. Both Babu Rajendra Prasad, President of India, and Pandit Nehru, the Prime Minister, came to pay him homage, making the last stage of their journey on foot. Foreigners in Delhi commented that such scenes could only be witnessed in India, and in this perhaps they were right; no Indian is surprised to see the mystic or the holy man receiving more respect than a monarch or a minister.

Vinobaji introduced himself to Delhi as Vaman, who covered the earth in three steps. He then explained what the three steps were that he wanted taken. Firstly, people must part with some of their land; secondly, they should do some service for others; and finally, they should give up all worldly possessions. He was not asking for alms, he said, but wanted people to give because it was morally right. "I am initiating the people into the tenets of a new ideology."

At an early prayer meeting the President of India, Babu Rajendra Prasad, told Vinobaji that he was welcome to a share of his private property. A few moments later a poor woman who had come from a great distance offered 1½ acres. Vinobaji said that to him both gifts had the same value. He has often been criticised for accepting gifts of land from poor people. It is argued that the land given is usually not a workable unit, and that the gift may leave the donor with a holding that is no longer economic. This criticism overlooks the supreme value that Vinoba places on the act of giving. One old woman from the Gorakhpur district told him that she had 6 acres of land and five sons; would he become the sixth son and accept one acre? Vinobaji accepted the offer immediately. "This acre is as good as 100,000 acres in my eyes," said he. "It is the blessing of that mother to my humble mission."

During his stay in Delhi Vinobaji refused several substantial cash gifts. He wanted to work without coming into contact with money, he explained. "I do not want to waste my efforts in dealing with the problems created by money, which is at the root of this country's degradation. People should work to live rather than ask others for money. Money should be eliminated from the daily routine. . . . For the peasant the produce is very nearly the same year after year, but the prices go up and down. It is not the price of the produce which fluctuates, but the

purchasing power of money." He said he had asked economists why such an unstable commodity should be the basis of all prices, and he had received no satisfactory answer. "I know that money, like God, is everywhere," he said, "and it is not easy to eliminate it from life." The harder the task, the more enthusiastic he felt about tackling it. "The currency that I want is labour, a currency the villagers have always used among themselves."

For three days Vinobaji talked with the members of the Planning Commission, making the same points that he had made to Patil. He attacked the import of food grains, the lack of full employment, and the scarcity of village wells. He argued that there could be no national respect unless there was the determination to make the country self-sufficient in food; that without a policy of full employment national planning was of no avail; that in spite of the river valley projects the Commission seemed to have ignored the need to tap underground water resources "by digging thousands of wells in all parts of the country."

Vinoba got sympathy, but little change out of the Planning Commission. "There is a difference between their approach and mine," he said, "though they also have the interest of the country at heart. My work is a purifying work. Whether it influences others or not, I personally am becoming purer of heart through this work and am nearing self-realisation." After this conference his mood was not that of his customary humility, but rather of resignation to the impossibility of making people understand the task. He shrugged off his depression with a return to the work he knew he could do.

Early on the morning of November 24, he left Delhi, gratified, he said, at the way the people had responded to his appeal, and convinced that the spirit of the times was with him. Turning east, he proposed to tour every possible corner of the 110,000 square miles of Uttar Pradesh.

He was demanding 10 million acres in land gifts from this state, twenty times the amount of that first instalment which his workers had resolved to raise at Mathura.

They made a strange sight, these *bhoodan* pilgrims, as they swung off along the dusty road in the crisp, chill, early-morning darkness of the North Indian winter. All were dressed in white homespun cloth, and most of them wore hand-woven scarves round their faces to ward off the cold. Vinobaji strode out in the lead, flanked usually by a couple of girl disciples, his devoted secretary always near at hand. Swinging hurricane lamps, the party marched at a brisk pace from village to village, sometimes singing hymns, sometimes arguing philosophy and economics. On one misty morning, in the Muzzafarnagar district between Sardhana and Khatauli, Vinobaji and two of his companions were knocked down by a wayward cyclist. Although Vinobaji got up quickly and continued his walk, he was found at Khatauli to have back and knee injuries. For a few further stages his followers carried him in a travelling chair, then he took to a ponderous bullock cart as far as Deoband in the Saharanpur district. At this centre of Islamic learning in Uttar Pradesh, Vinobaji endeared himself to the *ulemas* (Muslim learned religious leaders) by speaking Arabic and discussing the Koran. Within a few days he was among Hindus again at Kalsi.

The sacrifices performed by rulers in ancient India were called *Rajsooya-yagna,* or state sacrifices. Vinoba called his movement *Praja-sooya-yagna* or people's sacrifices. By now he was not only asking for land, but for wells, bullocks, ploughs and indeed all farming necessities. He was fond of saying that if only one well were sunk and given away at every wedding, the country's irrigation problems would soon be solved.

During the winter of 1951-52, Uttar Pradesh, a politically-minded province, was gripped by the fever of India's

first national election. Some of the *bhoodan* workers felt that Vinoba should suspend his efforts until the elections were over but he simply reminded them that he was not affected by worldly events. His mission was to do the will of God. "Whenever He likes, He may suspend both my programme and myself." Despite the counter-attractions of electioneering, Vinobaji's prayer meetings were as well attended as ever, and the gifts flowed in.

During the first months of 1952, the appeals of the *Sarvodaya* workers in Uttar Pradesh became more impassioned than ever as they sought to collect the 500,000 acres which they had promised Vinobaji as a "first instalment." At Mathura Vinobaji had appealed to his supporters to drop all other work and to concentrate on *bhoodan.* From mid-January to mid-April the workers collected 23,308 acres, a daily average higher than that achieved in Telengana. Meanwhile, Vinobaji never failed to find inspiration from various incidents along his route. In the Moradabad district a blind man came to the pilgrims' camp at one o'clock in the morning to present 6 acres of land—all that he had. He gave his name as Ram Charan, and when Vinobaji rose a few hours later and was told of the gift, he said at once, "They say that Ram Charan is blind. But in fact it is we who are blind. We should know that the feet of God himself have been here to bless this *bhoodan* sacrifice." At Ballia he was surprisingly presented with an address of welcome by the local communists. He was not at all disconcerted: "I can understand why the communists flourish here," he said. "Simply because there are no constructive workers here. If people gave real service there would be no room for the communists." Between Bahraich and Ballia he had been given 17,476 acres, a daily average of over 400 acres. He continued to discover goodness everywhere, and not merely among the givers of land. At Mohammedabad, in Ghazipur district, he noticed two

women spinning blindfold during his evening spinning session. "A very useful practice," he commented. "We must develop the capacity to spin not only during the day, but also during the night. Spinning with covered eyes brings immense peace, particularly when it is done in the austerity of silence."

The Sarvodaya organisation held its fourth annual conference (April 13-16) at Sevapuri, 14 miles from Benares. It was organised by the secretary, Sri Sankarrao Deo, who until recently had been secretary of the Congress Party, but had now given up politics to devote himself to Sarvodaya work. The first instalment of 500,000 acres in Uttar Pradesh had not materialised. Only a little over a fifth of that amount had been collected—but Sankarrao asked for 2½ million acres in the next two years, as a solid first instalment of the 50 million acres which Vinoba still demanded from the country. Vinobaji described to the Conference his own deep heart-searching after Gandhiji's death as to the best ways in which constructive Gandhian workers could keep in close touch with the common people. He saw three ways of doing so: the offering of spinning yarn for the poor at gatherings held in memory of Gandhiji; the freeing of themselves, as far as possible, from dependence on money; and *bhoodan* sacrificial giving, "a work of basic importance."

Vinobaji had by now covered 35 of the 50 administrative districts of Uttar Pradesh. He was not disappointed with the 100,000 acres he had received in gifts, and he now set out to travel through the rest of the state. On February 28th, at Akbarpur, he issued an appeal: "Fellow countrymen, I appeal to you all to contribute your share to this people's sacrifice, and to help to make this mission successful, in order to establish non-violence as the rule of society in the economic sphere. . . . This movement is in tune with the cultural traditions of India; it contains the

seed of economic and social revolution; it can help in the establishment of peace in the world." He knew he was not the leader to give a statesman's call to the nation. He was merely a humble follower of God. He held that Gandhiji, if he were alive, would never have appeared before the public like Vinoba himself, but would have concentrated all his attention on scavenging village streets and experimenting in the elimination of money as currency, through producing enough for the people's needs by agricultural methods. "Circumstances have compelled me to come out and be audacious enough to start this great sacrifice. Whether you consider it impertinence or humility, I dedicate the work to God, and ask your co-operation."

Vinobaji continued on his way, never failing to suit the word to the occasion. On May 1st, Labour Day, he pointed out at Fyzabad that his cause was the cause of the labourer —the weak, the landless, the voiceless, the humble men who had neither education nor organisation. Having spent 32 years, the best part of his life, as a labourer himself, he felt he was in a position to know how *bhoodan* could solve the land problem of India. Eight days later, Vinobaji was at Lucknow on Buddha Jayanti, the anniversary of the birth of the Lord Buddha. From the time of Buddha, he said, to the appearance of Gandhiji, hundreds of saints had demonstrated the great truth that anger is conquered by calmness, fear by fearlessness and enmity by love. It was for the people of India to decide how to solve their problems; if they used non-violent means all problems would be resolved in time. He believed that God was using him, weak though he was, to complete the task which He had begun through Buddha; it was another revolution of the wheel of duty which had begun with Buddha. He told the audience to remember his words: "Land will have to be redivided. The equal sharing of wealth is the cry of the

age. I have no doubt that it can be done peacefully. I can see it quite clearly. That is why I speak so confidently about it, and that is why I ask you to wake up, for, as Tulsidas once sang: 'The day is dawning and the birds on the trees are chirping merrily, and it is a time when gifts should be made to the poor; so awake, O Ram!'"

From the moment that he came within sight of the smoke of Kanpur's cotton mills, Vinobaji entered a triumphant phase. On his first day in the city he was given 13,000 acres; like a successful auctioneer he raised his quota for Kanpur to 100,000 acres, and also asked for 2,000 pairs of bullocks to be given to the 2,000 families of the landless who would work the gift property. Four days after his entry, distribution of the *bhoodan* among the landless poor was already beginning. After the first distribution, Vinobaji remarked that the landless would inevitably get land by other and perhaps violent means if *bhoodan* were not successful. But he felt that God had given this unique method, and asked the donors to regard themselves and the poor as members of one family.

Vinobaji was especially pleased with the little village of Tikkardi, where every single person in the village contributed something. One old man of eighty, who claimed to have about 50 dependants living off 2 acres of land, offered Vinobaji a share. Vinoba at once accepted 1/50th to the astonishment of several of his own followers, who thought that instead of taking land from the old man Vinobaji would give him some land. At Mangroth village he raised the cry, afterwards always chanted by his workers, "*Sabai Bhoomi Gopalki*" (All Land Belongs to God). Mangroth was unique. Vinobaji was given the entire village. Led by the largest landowner, Dewan Swatrughana Singh, the 65 families who owned land cheerfully signed away their whole property. There were 105 families alto-

gether in Mangroth (population 585) and Vinobaji left them working together in what he hoped was the ideal atmosphere for his cherished dream of village autonomy. He went on to Banda, birthplace of the poet Tulsidas. "One cannot ask for small gifts from the people of this land," he said. "This soil is sacred. I have set my heart on receiving 100,000 acres from the district." Sarvodaya workers of the area at once handed over pledges for 20,000 acres, and promised to secure the remaining 80,000 acres.

Jayaprakash Narayan, the most level-headed and inspiring of India's socialist leaders, came to visit Vinobaji at Banda. He came straight from the Socialist Party convention, and his presence was ultimately to prove of greater worth than many thousands of acres. In India the Socialist Party began with a group which broke away from Congress. It has always attacked Congress for betraying Gandhian principles and for failure to follow the doctrinaire socialist path. "After Gandhiji's death," said Jayaprakash Narayan at Banda, "one felt that the inspiration which urged us on to sacrifice and suffering had gone for good. But now once more we feel that we can solve our problems by non-violence. I trust that through this instrument of *bhoodan yagna* the two currents of Gandhism and Socialism will meet like the two rivers, Ganges and Jumna, and will contribute to India's prosperity and betterment."

Early in June Vinobaji reached the Fatehpur district where he had met Gandhiji for the first time thirty-six years earlier. "I was then a young boy," he said. "Since that time I have followed his leadership." Beyond Fatehpur lay Allahabad district where Vinobaji was welcomed on behalf of the local residents by Sri Purshottamdas Tandon. Purshottamdas Tandon had in 1931 been a controversial president of the Congress Party, appearing to many to be more devoted to sectarian Hindu interests than to the liberal advancement of the nation. He had resigned

the post in favour of Pandit Nehru before the general elections. Now Purshottamdas Tandon showed that he understood and wholly supported what Vinobaji was attempting, saying that the work that had been begun was epoch-making. "A new type of beggar has come to our door. Around him is being built a new atmosphere, devotional and quite revolutionary." Vinobaji likened his own work to that of the bee gathering nectar from the flowers. *Bhoodan* likewise hurt nobody. "I believe that the true good of one cannot clash with the true good of another. Nor can the good of one country go counter to that of another. I do not merely want people's land. I want also to win their hearts. . . ."

In slashing monsoon rain Vinobaji entered the historic city of Allahabad on June 24. The weather did not prevent him addressing meeting after meeting in Purshottamdas Park. 27,561 acres of land were given him; he demanded that the figure be raised to 100,000. "We must get our 50 million acres as soon as possible. . . . I have not taken up this work thinking it easy. It is the hardest possible task of our time. I am performing it as a religious duty. I have decided to carry on whatever may happen to me personally. . . ." There seemed to be a special sense of urgency in his speech, even a threat: "Should such revolutionary work fail to stir you to activity, I should clearly have to prepare myself for greater self-sacrifice."

Vinobaji alternated between moods of high optimism and great depression. He had seemed all-conquering in the stormy days after Kanpur, but now there was a reaction, fed by Vinoba's natural caution. On July 1, Uttar Pradesh was celebrating Landlord Abolition Day. The State Assembly, after a bitter delaying action by the landlords, had managed to enact a law limiting the size of holdings and making it possible for the tenant to buy his land on

payment of several years' rent. The landlords, discontented with the terms of compensation, were not the only critics. Tenants complained that they were only getting a change of landlord—from the arbitrary but approachable individual to the standardised, snail-like state; they had not the savings to buy their plots outright. Agricultural experts were concerned at the inefficiency that might result from the breaking up of the big estates. Vinobaji, at his evening prayer meeting at Chunar, was as usual thinking along his own lines: "Some of you may have celebrated this day. But what had I to celebrate? As long as there are distressed landless people among us there is no cause for rejoicing. . . . What can I say to-day to these afflicted ones? The life they are leading is miserable beyond words."

At the beginning of July Vinobaji re-entered Benares and decided to wait for the monsoon to rain itself out. He stayed there for 70 days, made unhappy for him by the death on June 9th of one of his most valiant disciples, Kishorlal Mashruwala. "If anyone gave himself completely to *bhoodan* work it was he," mourned Vinobaji. "His very presence at Wardha gave me strength. In the Gita there is mention of action in non-action. Kishorlalbhai was an example of it. . . ." The lives and ways of thinking of the really dedicated followers of Gandhi were so closely knit on a spiritual plane that the loss of one comrade was a severe blow. Such perfect communication of ideas between people is rare. Vinobaji gave some hint of the torment which he had suffered in giving up this rarefied life of seclusion to some 500 of his Uttar Pradesh workers who gathered on September 11th to greet him on his birthday. "I have often said, like Hanumân (the monkey deity), 'There can be no rest for me until God's work is done.' I decided that until this problem of the landless was satisfactorily solved, I would give up the idea of going back to

my *ashram.* The *ashram* is a place steeped in an atmosphere of renunciation and austerity. It was in the *ashram* that I ceaselessly carried on my work. Even to-day, the members of the *ashram* are carrying on the most revolutionary experiment of our time, that of trying to live without money. The *ashram* affords us a kind of protection. But I felt that the time had come for me to leave its protective care. Having made this decision I am now dedicating it to the Lord in your presence." In a voice charged with deep emotion, he said: "The seers of old and the Gita counselled three things: Sacrifice, Charity and Austerity. Of these, through *Bhoodan,* I called for two, Sacrifice and Charity. But unless we insist on Austerity, the other two ideals will not be fulfilled. It is for the workers to adopt austerity."

The pilgrimage in Uttar Pradesh was almost over. In Moghalsarai, Vinobaji asked his Uttar Pradesh workers to pledge that so long as the land problem was not solved, they would work single-mindedly for the *bhoodan* sacrifice all their lives. "I shall sign first," he said. "Those of you who sign should do so only after mature deliberation. I do not expect a long list of workers. Kishorlalbhai was one such worker. His example is worth emulation." The pledge was accordingly signed by the workers.

September 13 was Vinobaji's last day in Uttar Pradesh. He had toured every district except remote Almora, high in the ranges of the Himalayas. He had covered 3,750 miles, and had been given 295,028 acres of land. He had received many other gifts as well, ranging from six horses and 130,000 bricks, through countless promises of labour, to four ponds and 231 wells, 531 trees and many hundredweight of seeds. Before dawn on the 14th, Vinobaji had reached the bank of the Karamanasa river, the boundary between Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. A pleasant breeze was blowing. A little boat was ready to take him across into

Bihar, to the birthplace of Lord Buddha. With a happy smile, his palms pressed together in salutation, Vinobaji called on God to bless his friends in Uttar Pradesh for what they had done for him. He was sure that the concept of *Bhoodan* had settled deep into the hearts of the villagers of Uttar Pradesh.

Chapter Five

IN THE LAND OF LORD BUDDHA

CROSSING the river, Vinobaji entered the Shahabad district of Bihar, his mind filled with thoughts and associations connected with the birthplace of Gautama Buddha. He had covered a distance of a thousand miles on foot, despite bad weather, injuries and poor health, and now he found himself, God be thanked, in a district associated with the presence of Lord Buddha, the scene of his wanderings and his austerities, of his meditation and deeds of piety and compassion, the place where he preached his message of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) to the world. It was the Blessed One's gospel of universal love, compassion and renunciation that had first kindled in his heart while he was in his teens the desire to go to the Himalayas to study the great doctrine of Renunciation, to reduce himself to nothingness, to be wholly absorbed in contemplation.

To turn one's back on the world, on home and family, on property, sovereignty, pomp, power and privilege, to retire to forests for inspiration and enlightenment in the search for Truth, is an old traditional practice that has come down to the people of the East, where the sages of the world first appeared at the dawn of human history. The earliest example was that of Zarathushtra, the prophet of Iran, who was closely connected with one of the royal families in ancient Iran. At the age of fifteen he withdrew from the world, and spent years in solitude amidst dreary wastes and wildernesses, meditating deeply on the mystery of existence and the eternal problem of good and evil. About a thousand, or perhaps five thousand, years later,

according to the date of the Iranian prophet given by classical writers, another scion of a royal family abandoned his home and throne, and wandered into the woods. There he sat, meditating under the Bodhi tree in the Gaya district of Bihar, in search of enlightenment. After a further interval of two thousand years, yet another teacher was seen traversing the same district, stirring the people to turn their thoughts and energies to the creation of an ideal order of society. That saintly teacher was Gandhiji. Now it was given to Vinoba, as his faithful follower, to tread the same path, to wander about the same countryside, and to preach the message of the love of God and the love of one's fellow men.

In this land, which had produced great souls like Buddha and Ashoka, he had surely the right to demand much greater gifts than those he had received from areas less blest. Could he not ask for thousands upon thousands of acres? "Either I shall succeed in solving the land problem of Bihar," he said, "or my body will turn to dust and mingle with the soil of Bihar."

Huge crowds of people, including women in Purdah, had gathered at Durgavati to greet this great sage. He urged them to share with others what they possessed, and to regard the village as a single united family. At noon, he addressed workers who had come from all parts of Bihar. The keynote of the speech was a warning not to become engrossed in petty matters. He needed earnest workers as much as he needed land. His initial experience in Bihar was not encouraging, but he was determined to make Bihar a test case. At Patna he solemnly announced, on October 23, that he had resolved not to leave Bihar, the land of the great teachers, Janaka, Buddha, Mahavira and Gandhi, until its land problem had been solved. On the following day he also announced that he had made up his mind to launch a campaign for the sacrificial giving of

money and to ask for gifts of wealth as well as of land. He had decided that the money thus obtained would be kept by the donor, who would "use it as we want him to do and render us the account annually."

Bihar now began to move. On October 25, the State Congress Committee unanimously passed a resolution to the effect that "four hundred thousand acres of land must be obtained for *Bhoodan* by 28th February 1953." It called upon the members of the legislatures "to take steps to complete the quota of their respective areas" and asked all Congressmen to "donate one-sixth of their land at the earliest moment." This was the first time in the history of the movement that a State Congress Committee had co-operated in this way. On the same day another resolution was adopted at a meeting of the Sarvodaya workers of Bihar, pledging full co-operation. Vinobaji now decided to concentrate all his efforts on a single selected district. On November 2, his party camped at Bodh Gaya, the City where the Lord Buddha had obtained enlightenment. Feeling deeply the all-pervasive presence of the Enlightened in this holy city, he told his audience at the prayer meeting that he had been endeavouring to follow in the footsteps of the Master. According to the Muslim teaching it was their duty to deliver from misery the unhappy amongst them, and to succour those who lived uncared for as the castaways of society. To expedite *Bhoodan* work in this district, Vinobaji placed his secretary, Damodardas Mundada, on special duty. A Gaya District *Bhoodan* Committee was also formed.

Entering Ranchi, on November 25, in his prayer speech at Kudu, Vinobaji dwelt on the "eternal ideal of equality." "Differences will remain," he said, "but there will be equality and an inner unity. . . . Equality does not mean that everyone should have five acres of land, and

the same kind of house building or an equal yardage of cloth. We only ask that the necessities of life, such as air, water and land, should be equally accessible to all. No one will grudge the surplus which may be left over for some people after everyone has had enough. We want equality tempered with discrimination."

The use of force to achieve equality does more harm than good. Wherever attempts have been made to bring equality by force, the idea of equality had proved abortive. "A mother does not distribute food among her children on the basis of mathematical equality. To the youngest one she gives only milk, the next some bread and some milk, and to the grown-ups only bread. In the same way, in society we must also exercise discrimination and take into account the intensity of hunger and the power of digestion of each in the distribution of food." Where equality is brought about by force, all are compelled to conform to the same pattern. Vinoba is totally against that kind of regimentation.

At a Conference held on November 30, at Tiril, Vinoba initiated the doctrine of sharing one's wealth with other members of society (*sampattidan*). He asked the students of the district to discuss the idea among their friends and to propagate it. It was only for the sake of convenience that wealth was held by individuals. Everybody had a right to it. Just as a man kept his money in different banks for convenience, so also should wealth be distributed among different houses. Ultimately, a time would come when people would give away their surplus wealth to the needy without caring for the morrow, knowing that when they were in need of money, they too would have it.

The Bhoodan missionaries entered the malarial district of Singhbhum on December 3. Germs of disease know

no distinction between saint and sinner. Vinobaji had an attack of fever. Nevertheless, he insisted on his programme being followed rigidly. But it was difficult to carry it out if he persisted, ill as he was, in going on foot from place to place. The only possible means of conveyance was the bullock cart and it had to be used for the journey to Kanderbera and Chandil. Meanwhile, Vinobaji's condition became steadily worse. He refused to take quinine. Nor would he consult any doctor. All the time, however, he was calm and collected.

For a Saint attuned to the Thy-Will-Be-Done state of mysticism, who had rendered himself inwardly free through the subjugation of self and had given himself up completely to the will of God, the problem of medical treatment did not arise. When Rabiah, the Muslim seer, fell ill, she said, "I suffered myself to think on the delights of Paradise, therefore my Lord has punished me." Three theologians called upon her in an effort to inspire in her a spirit of resignation. One of them said: "The prayers of the man who refuses to bear the Lord's chastisements are not sincere." Another added: "He is not sincere who does not rejoice in the Lord's chastisements." To Rabiah, however, these words still savoured of self. She, therefore, exclaimed, "He is not sincere in his prayers who does not, when he beholds his Lord, become totally unconscious of the fact that he is being chastised." Vinobaji, however, had no reason to regard his illness as chastisement, being innocent of the slightest deviation from the mystic path. Instead, he looked upon his illness as a test of fitness for continuing his service to the Lord. "If," he said to his colleagues who were persuading him to take quinine, "this frail body is not fit for more service to the Lord and if He wishes to call me away, no amount of drugging will be of any avail.

If, however, after testing me He wants to have more work from me, whether I take or do not take medicine, I shall have another lease of life to serve Him."

News of Vinobaji's illness reached the ears of the President of India, Babu Rajendra Prasad, and the Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru. They sent him urgent messages imploring him to accept medical treatment. The physicians who had seen him suspected that the fever might be of a malignant type. They asked for Vinobaji's consent to examine his blood. "No use," was the emphatic reply. Again messages were received from the President and the Prime Minister, also from the Governor of Bihar, Shri R. R. Diwakar, entreating Vinobaji to allow the doctors to examine his blood. The patient relented and gave his consent. The blood test confirmed the doctors' suspicion. It was not an illness that could be left to nature to cure. The germs of the disease must be destroyed by treatment. But the philosopher-patient was obdurate. "Why not return to Ranchi and go to Jamshedpur, instead of being confined to this pestilential place?" suggested one of the followers. "But," said the victim of the fever, "I was there only two weeks ago. Why should we turn back to these places? Do not people die in Ranchi? Whatever befalls the population of this place will happen to me. If God wishes to save me, He will do so, irrespective of what we do."

On December 17 Vinobaji's temperature went up to 105°. The physicians were hurriedly sent for. Once more appeals were made to Vinobaji to take the necessary medicine. But the Saint, whose mind had complete mastery over matter, was a hard nut to crack, in spite of his gentleness. "This is the last act of the drama," he said in mirth. Although his body was getting steadily weaker, his mind was active and agile, the intellect clear as crystal. Shri Babu, the Chief Minister of

Bihar, decided that the situation could no longer be allowed to drift in this way. It was time that one more appeal were made, more stirring and more challenging than those that had hitherto proved futile; Vinobaji must be made to realise the agonising predicament in which he was placing them. When Babuji entered the room, Vinobaji's secretary, Damodardas, who had rushed to his bedside from Gaya, announced his arrival. Hearing the name, Vinoba opened his eyes. Going near him, Babuji said with folded hands: "Baba, this is a question not only of your health and your precious life. It is a question also of our honour, the reputation of all the people of Bihar. How can we see your illness drag on without the necessary precautions and treatment to check the fever and avert risk to a life so dear to the whole country?"

"What does Damodar say?" asked Baba.

"Baba," replied his devoted secretary, "we all wish and earnestly pray that you take the mixture."

Baba closed his eyes. During the few minutes of silence and meditation that ensued, his affection for his colleagues and consideration for their feelings and peace of mind appeared to have prevailed over his reluctance to submit himself to medical treatment, although he regarded it as a puerile attempt at interference with the dispensation of Providence. Reopening his eyes, he said in a gentle tone: "Since it is the wish of all of you that I must take the mixture, to go counter to it would mean going beyond the limit of non-violence and in a sense causing violence to your feelings. In the circumstances, I must submit to your wishes."

What a relief it was to all who were standing by his bedside! When the news reached the friends gathered outside they too sighed with relief. The mixture that he took had the desired effect. The fever subsided. But Vinobaji had lost so much weight and was so weak that it

became necessary to stay at Chandih until the fifth session of the Sarvodaya Samaj was over. Baba's illness made his followers put all their energy in the work of Bhoodan. The visit of the Socialist stalwart, Jayaprakash Narayan, a few days later, to attend the Sarvodaya meeting, had a tonic effect on them. He had already identified himself with the movement. The resolution passed by the Socialist Party in its support was due mainly to his interest in the Yagna, and now he was determined to devote his life to the work, convinced that Bhoodan was the only way of life for mankind in this age. During Vinobaji's illness he had sent him a cheering letter stating: "Please be at peace; we will carry on your work." On his arrival at Chandil he thrilled the workers with his announcement that he had decided to throw himself heart and soul into the work of Bhoodan. His inspiring declaration of life dedication was to follow a year later.

The "constructive" workers of India assembled at Chandil (March 7 to 9, 1953). To set up a little colony for about 2,000 persons in this small town on the Chota Nagpur plateau was a major problem. Palm leaves were used to form the walls and roof of the tenements improvised for the delegates. Simple straw was used to cover the floor. There were no cots, and no bedding. The marquee or "pandal" in which meetings took place symbolised the creed of simplicity embraced by the Sarvodaya brotherhood. There were no flags, no bunting, no curtains, no pictures—only a small platform draped in a white handwoven covering.

After a few words of welcome from Shri Lakshmi Babu, veteran leader of the workers of Bihar, who had with the help of his colleagues made all these ingenious arrangements for holding the meeting in such a simple setting, the Sarvodaya exhibition was opened. Shri Dhirendra Mazumdar, President of the All India Spinners' Association,

presided. Everyone present rejoiced that Vinobaji had sufficiently recovered from his illness to be able to attend the gathering. Notable speeches were made, and resolutions passed on this occasion gave a definite shape to the Bhoodan movement and expounded the Sarvodaya ideal of economic freedom and dignity of labour. With refreshing candour Babu Rajendra Prasad admitted that the high hopes of the people with regard to the acquisition of independence had not been realised. It was sadder still that he could not say when and if they would be realised at all. Those in office, he declared, without mincing his words, had not the courage to attain the desired objective. Surrounded by pomp and glitter, they neither followed the cherished ideal nor even believed in it. Although he personally believed in the high ideals of the fellowship, he did not always live up to them, but he hoped to profit from his contacts with the members of the Sarvodaya.

The main speech of the session was that of Vinobaji. It was a kind of manifesto, clarifying issues, resolving doubts, and defining the duties of the workers. Vinobaji specifically laid down the nature of the work which they were to do and he infused a sense of new life into the movement. A couple of months ago, Vinobaji recalled, Rajendra Babu had addressed a meeting of scholars and philosophers from all parts of the world who were gathered to evaluate the technique and application of non-violence. Dr. Rajendra Prasad had stated that no nation in the world had yet had the courage to declare that it could function without military force. Despite Gandhiji's teachings, even his own followers, now in power, could not venture to do so. Pandit Nehru, who believed that no world problem could be solved through physical force, had to accept the responsibility of increasing the military strength of the country. Rajen Babu had told the meeting that the atmosphere of fear and distrust among nations

was such that they were piling up more and more armaments. Thus the responsibility of building a new society on the basic principles for which the brotherhood stood devolved on active workers. If they remained outside the sphere of politics and administration and worked to build the new society, they would be more helpful to Government than if they were to accept office.

Why did not Vinoba ask the Government to bring in legislation for obtaining land without payment of compensation to owners? His answer was: "Brother, I do not stand in the way of legislation. I have not yet fully succeeded. If I have 75% or even 50% success, I can claim that a favourable atmosphere has been created for legislation. Two things are necessary. One that I should see that there should be no obstruction in the way of legislation and the other that I must pave the way for it." Self-respect demanded that a change should be brought about in people's mental outlook without the aid of legislation, so that they themselves would voluntarily distribute available land among the landless. The real task of the active workers was, therefore, to build up the strength and power of public consciousness, and to direct it against violence. Similarly, were Vinoba to ask Government to enforce the programme of *Khadi* (homespun) through legislation, he would fail to create the necessary people's force, as distinct from police force. Bearing those ideals in mind the fellowship should work for the peaceful conversion of people by making them think about the ultimate objective, and it should urge the distribution of work among individuals without setting up an administrative authority.

Vinobaji attached the greatest importance to the task of propagating right thoughts and ideals. He, therefore, explained at some length what he meant by peaceful conversion. It means, he said, "readiness on your part to

understand the other person's point of view and to explain ours to him. In no case should our views be imposed on anyone." The peculiar set-up of the Sarvodaya Fellowship had led some people to describe it as a loose organisation. This was not true. A loose organisation could not work. Rather was it an organised movement in which the power of thought was the sole instrument for the worker. "We neither give nor take orders," Vinoba declared. "On the contrary, we hold friendly consultations. I will rejoice if a person refuses to act on my advice if he does not approve of it. If, however, he were to act on it without understanding it, I should be sorry." He was convinced that the organisation that would be built in this way would surpass any other, no matter how efficient and disciplined.

Vinobaji said one of their instruments of work was decentralisation. There should be no concentration of power at any one centre. Every village should be helped to function independently. It must have the power to decide what things it would not import. The Government might object to this on the ground that they could not allow a state to grow within a state. Villagers should, nevertheless, decide which goods they would produce in the village and then ask Government to ban the import of certain other goods. "If the Government does not come to their help," he said, "the village should be bold enough to stand up against them. Such resistance by the people would pave the way for doing away with the need for military forces. The centre can never govern numerous villages well and wisely. Instead of setting up a body of planners for the whole nation, regardless of how competent they may be, every village should become its own planner. The role of the Central Government should merely be to help in this village planning.

Suggestions were received from several quarters that a ceiling should be fixed as regards ownership and distribu-

tion of land. "But," observed Vinoba, "in a building the floor comes first and is more important than the ceiling; so also in regard to the distribution of land we must first fix the lowest limit of the land that a cultivator should own. The labourers to-day toil and toil. They have no initiative, nor the power to act. They work like lifeless machines." Vinobaji wanted them to work not only with their hands but with their brains. Land distribution was a part of this plan to train the people to exercise their intelligence and to shoulder their individual responsibilities.

Turning to the mechanism of Bhoodan, Vinobaji explained that there would be two institutions, one named Serv Seva Sangh, the other Sarvodaya Samaj. The latter would work in an impersonal way as a word expressive of an idea-force, while the former would work in a concrete manner. Complementary to each other, they would advance the cause together. The members of the Samaj must work for the propagation of thought among the people. The Serv Seva Sangh "should not be a mere mass of different constructive institutions, but should strive to achieve a unity of purpose and programme." Institutions must change their form in accordance with this need.

Fifty million acres of land must be transferred from the landowners to the landless by the year 1957. Vinobaji believed that it could be done if all workers took up this work in the right spirit. "It will be a glorious achievement," he said, "if we are able to do it, without legislation, with the aid of the People's Force alone—I will then dance with joy. But we may not achieve such perfect success and may have to do it partly with the help of legislation. In any case, our emphasis must be on doing it mainly with the People's Force."

Along with the giving of land, Vinobaji had the thought of sacrificial monetary gifts, but had decided to proceed on the principle—"attend ye to the root; all else

will grow automatically." The land problem was more fundamental than any other. But when he went to Bihar and decided to tackle its land problem on a larger scale than before, he felt that it was time to start the monetary gifts. The money donated would remain with the donor, but he would spend it in accordance with instructions. Vinoba did not wish to widen this programme and give it the form of a social movement. It was to be done through personal approach to individuals. They had to convert not only individuals but also members of their families. The donor should never be hustled. He should rather be restrained from making a precipitate decision because the pledge required him to continue the donation year after year throughout his life.

"Yarn offering," in Gandhiji's memory, was another activity of the members of the fellowship. "It is," observed Vinobaji, "a thing pregnant with tremendous possibilities." Only they had not yet recognised it. He wanted the people to offer spinning as a sign of acceptance of the responsibility of adding to the wealth of the country by agreeing to do physical labour. It would be of great help in inculcating the dignity of labour among the people. Vinobaji envisaged another important use for spinning and weaving. It was customary to run institutions with the help of money from friends and sympathisers. But times had changed. They were now in "the age of the supremacy of labour." It was a welcome change and they should help it by running their institutions on the basis of labour. "Yarn-offering" will enable us to run our institutions without any dependence on money and to produce spirited workers.

The next stirring speech was Jayaprakash Narayan's. The greater the energy he put into it, the more the work of Bhoodan Yagna grew on him. "Despair had seized our heart," he said, "after the attainment of independence. We

felt that the face of society could not be altered through the technique of non-violence. Ahimsa (passive resistance) was given only one meaning—we must not resort to Himsa or violence." Vinobaji has dispelled our illusions. As the light of Bhoodan Yagna has spread, the clouds of doubt and darkness have disappeared. "To-day," he said, "everybody has accepted the fact that land is the mother of one and all and each has equal right upon it. He who labours to produce from the land has the first right. This is the intellectual revolution that has taken place within the last two years. Now the task before all of us is to give this revolution a practical shape, and to make it a reality."

Jayaprakash combines the idealism of a reformer with the perspective of a student of politics and history, and he has no doubt that Bhoodan Yagna is the herald of total revolution. It is the foundation-stone of the new society. "Hence with all our strength let us take to it. Political party workers have a vanity of their own. They think that they can do a lot. I share this vanity. But I want to tell all of them that they should abandon all activities for at least one year and devote themselves to Bhoodan Yagna."

On the following day, speaking at the Youth Conference, Jayaprakash recalled the days when as a youth he was swept off his feet by the Gandhian tempest that raged over the country during the non-co-operation movement of 1921. He was then a student in Patna College. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had gone there to preach non-co-operation. That silver-tongued scholar induced many students to leave college. There was need for a similar "revolution in the minds of the students of to-day." Jayaprakash advised them to suspend their studies and carry the revolutionary message of Bhoodan Yagna to the people, just as he had done in order to spread the Gandhian message of non-co-operation. Vinobaji had given them the same

advice. It was inconceivable that a learned man of Vinoba's eminence would denounce learning. Why then did he ask them to suspend their studies? It was because the kind of education that was given to them was beneficial neither to them nor to the country.

It was not difficult to understand how Sarvodaya and Socialism, understood aright, could be reconciled. Wherever attempts had been made to achieve the aims of socialism through violent means, exploitation had not been removed, equality had not been established and the individual had not gained full opportunities for development. Mere destruction of the existing social order did not mean establishment of the ideal order. "The Socialists think," Jayaprakash added, "that as soon as capitalism is destroyed the new order will become established." But they were mistaken. Socialism was not a negative thing. "Take, for instance," he said, "nationalisation, which is a plank of socialism. Nationalisation alone will not bring in the socialistic order. We have noticed it in our own country and in other countries as well, quite apart from the case of Russia. Our railways to-day belong to everyone. They are no longer the possession of a company, they are the property of the entire nation. Nevertheless, if we were to say that the Railway administration was free from exploitation, we would be mistaken. True, there is no capitalism now; neither is there Socialism. What rules is bureaucracy." Similarly, if we were to say that by nationalising the other industries we were ushering in socialism, it would be self-deception.

How was reality to be attained? Vinobaji had opened the way. Sarvodaya had already enabled them to proceed in the direction in which their thinking was taking them. "If we are true Socialists," he urged, "we will also be true followers of Sarvodaya."

Answering a query as to how democracy could be estab-

lished, Vinobaji pointed out that the first essential was to establish village government. If they were true socialists, they would proclaim their faith in village autonomy.

"Had Vinobaji not launched the Bhoodan Yagna campaign," said Jayaprakash, "we might have forgotten Gandhiji and forgotten Sarvodaya; we might have lost faith in what Gandhiji had said and done and the path of Sarvodaya would have been blocked. Vinobaji had infused new life in us by placing the Bhoodan Yagna programme before us. Otherwise, the constructive workers would have continued ploughing their lonely furrows. This would certainly have benefited the country to some extent, but the hope of the common man that the followers of Gandhiji would take steps for the transformation of society would have been shattered and an armed revolution would have ensued, with entirely different consequences."

To some people it seemed that Socialists like Jayaprakash were "going astray" in allowing exploitation to continue. Those critics would prefer the Russian way. To them Jayaprakash's answer was: If the aim was to establish a society free from exploitation, and if this aim were achieved through violent means, it would still remain unrealised. Violence sets in motion new forms of exploitation. Exploitation signified denial to man of his rights. Complete removal of exploitation could not be expected. "Even to-day," he added, "the level of our own life is far higher than that of our brethren, so it cannot be denied that we have exploited them. You are to-day engaged in your studies; a great deal of money is being spent on you. Such expenses cannot be incurred by the poor for the education of their children. So a part of the responsibility for exploitation rests on you."

To hope for the complete removal of exploitation was to hope for the impossible. But the ideal had to be pursued. Even in Russia differences existed. The highly

paid drew forty times as much as the lowest wage-earners; exploitation was far from being extinct there. A society truly free from exploitation can be created only through non-violence.

Only as Bhoodan Yagna was popularised would people living in rural India become more and more conscious of their rights and would begin to think of opposing exploitation through non-violent means. In this work of stirring the rural population to a sense of their rights and their obligations Jayaprakash wanted the youth of the country to play their part. "Give up your studies," he urged, "go and wander about in the villages and make what contribution you can to the Bhoodan movement and try to make this revolution a success." Then, in a reminiscent mood, he gave his audience a glimpse into the romance of his life after he had cut short his academic career. He became a convert to communism, and had decided to make a trip to Russia. He had left college and was prepared to accept any job, but could not secure any. Then he fell ill, incurred debts, but cleared them later by working. "On looking back from this distance," he said, "it does not appear to me that I lost anything by losing a year at the college. I have never felt that what I learnt in the fields and factories was inferior or negligible instruction. Similarly, the education you will receive from the villages can never be got from schools and colleges. . . . If your parents are concerned about your future, about the development of your personality, they will of their own accord say, 'All right, go and work for a year.' Everyone should dedicate himself to Bhoodan Yagna for a year. People are giving away their lands; let us give our time and energy." What a revolution it would be, a revolution that would set an example to the whole world, if India were to succeed in solving the problem of land through truly democratic methods!

The Five Year Plan and the Government Community Projects often figured in discussions concerning the Sarvodaya ideology. The main objection to the Plan was that it was based on an outlook far removed from that of the Sarvodaya workers. After Vinobaji had placed this objection before the Planning Commission, it had tried "to make some adjustments." The difference, however, still remained and was bound to remain. Vinoba was reluctant to dwell on points of difference beyond what was necessary for clarity of thinking. To oppose the plan would have been merely destructive. They themselves had no substitute plan for constructive work. "I think it improper from the point of view of non-violence," he said, "to use our influence to create confusion, and to prevent even the good points from becoming effective. A Government by its very nature remains incapable of going much beyond what is warranted by the circumstances existing at a particular time. No matter how good a plan made by Government may be, it will always fall short of our ideals and expectations. Therefore, as followers of non-violence, it is our duty to express our approval for the good points in any such plan and desist from creating confusion." He knew that the Government was "very much under the influence of capitalism." Not that they wanted the capitalist order, but they thought there was no alternative in the present circumstances.

To what extent should the workers co-operate with Government in their schemes? It was Vinoba's opinion that they should certainly co-operate in those plans which they approved of. They could give to Government their advice and assistance if and when it was sought and when there was need, but to make the plans any part of their own responsibilities would be a mistake. The Sarvodaya Samaj was based on freedom and workers were free to think and act for themselves. Some workers considered

the projects good and they had offered their services to Government. There were others who rejected them as being totally ruinous to the country. There was a third section of workers who regarded them as good in part and were prepared to help the Government, subject to certain conditions. His own attitude was that they should go their own way, devoting all their energy and time to their own chosen mission.

What about their relations with different political parties? Party politics in Vinoba's opinion were something foreign to the genius of the people of India. The different parties should be dissolved and they should all combine to form "a united front made up of all good and honest people in the country carrying out commonly agreed programmes." To that end he had tried to evolve a programme of work likely to be acceptable to all, and in which all could join. "If all these parties take it up in the right spirit," he said, "we may hope that the next elections in 1957 will not be, as at present, between good and honest people opposing one another, but between all of them ranged on one side against those who oppose progress on the other."

These were the views of a saint spiritualising politics. He held that the differences which divided the people of goodwill were only superficial. A core of common agreement could always be found which would serve as a basis for a common programme acceptable to all. "I hold the view," he said, "that a proposal on which the good differ among themselves is not worthy of implementation. Only such programmes should be placed before the people as are agreed on by the good."*

Who were to be regarded as "the good"? The sage of rural India preferred not to go further into that question at the moment, and he contented himself with emphasis

* *Harijan*, May 23, 1953.

on the duty of all to bridge the gulf between the different parties and invoked the teaching of the Gita. All the differences we see, according to that gospel, are only on the surface. Underneath is unity. "We should try to seize that," he said. "Then only can we create the atmosphere of unity." Divergence of views there will always be, but "in the field of action we must aim at unity." Hinduism allowed full freedom of *thought,* but in the field of *action,* "the programme of work undertaken must have the approval of all men of good intent."*

Vinoba wondered how they could accelerate the pace of the great mission undertaken by them. He had come to the conclusion that all the energy of Bhoodan workers should be concentrated for the time being on a few selected districts in Bihar. "From now on," he told the workers, "you should give all your time and energy to this Yagna, each in his own province. And this you should do in the spirit of dedication, leaving everything else—even good things."

There was nothing new in what he was telling them. It was a recognised precept in the way of devotion. "Come to me as thy sole refuge, abandoning all dharmas", was the call of the Gita. "Our way," he said, "is the way of devotion, for we seek to introduce love and harmony into society which cannot be done except through devotion." Then Vinobaji advised the Bihar workers to concentrate their effort on a few selected districts. If they could achieve success in those parts, it would demonstrate its practicability and give a tremendous impetus to the work of Bhoodan. Its completion would be merely a matter of time. He declared that he would not leave the province until the land problem was finally solved, but he hoped he would not have to stay on until the next conference was held. The workers of Bihar would, he prayed, fulfil the

* *Harijan*, May 23, 1953, p.95.

quota of 32 lakhs of acres and enable him to proceed to another province.

The Conference had a vitalising effect on the workers. Deeply impressed that Bhoodan was not merely an addition to their programme of activities, but their sole duty and activity until the land problem was solved, they dispersed to their respective centres. After three months' compulsory detention at Chandil, Vinobaji resumed his trek on March 13. Spending a week in Maubhum district, he entered Hazaribagh on March 25. At Giridhi, the Raja of Dhanbad gave a hundred thousand and one acres of land, the largest single donation received so far.

Vinoba then entered the Gaya district for the second time on April 13, and stayed at Gaya town on May 3 and 4. The Bihar Congress Committee met on May 3, and passed a resolution exhorting workers to collect 3,200,000 acres of land, as desired by Vinobaji. Here a young Bihari, a representative of the youth of Bihar, who had met Vinobaji before the prayer meeting, had an interesting discussion with the apostle of non-violence regarding the virtue of atom bombs. "When other countries in the world are manufacturing and resorting to atom bombs, do you believe," he asked, "we, in India, can do all we want to do by merely preaching homilies and sermons?"

"Not merely by preaching," replied the Grand Old Man of Rural India, "but by practising them. After all, an atom bomb is merely a form of material energy. It cannot change anyone's thought, it has none of the spiritual force of thought."

At his prayer speech Vinobaji reverted to that discussion, and made it the theme of a stirring address, expounding the superiority of thought, power and soul force over every other weapon for transforming the world. The atom bomb was also the result of a thought. It is being pro-

duced only to propagate a certain thought, though a defective one. Thought alone had given birth to the atom bomb; the mightiest weapons could do nothing by themselves. It required a thinking man to utilise them. "The basis of all human activity is thought, which may take an outward form of an atom bomb, or of a gift deed. Both originate from thought. When a new thought stirs a man, he creates plans and projects to give shape to it; but if that thought were found to be defective, the whole superstructure created for it collapses. These experiments have been constantly tried since the creation of the world in all branches of life—sociology, politics, religion. One thought after another is tried. If it is found wrong, another purer thought takes its place. It is thought alone which inspires and induces man to build houses, create governments and parliaments and all that forms a part of his life. People told him that the whole world was creating more and more dangerous weapons. That was true, but the greatest powers of the world had only a limited number of weapons, whereas he possessed an unlimited number in the form of thought. "When this sun of thought shines, the darkness of ignorance has to go. That is why those who go to the roots of the problems of human life always try to keep the weapon of thought in their hands."*

In short, Vinobaji aimed at the complete transformation of human life on the enduring basis of true thought. But man found himself incapable of shouldering the responsibility. "We are all an unfit lot," said he. "I too find myself ill-qualified for this work. By nature I am inclined more towards meditation and contemplation. But it would appear that God has decided to make use of the unfit and ill-qualified for His purpose."

Teachers have been pioneers in the field of new achieve-

* *Harijan*, June 6, 1953, p.109/10.

ments. It is the wise ones who have built up India. It was, therefore, Vinobaji's earnest desire that teachers as well as students should go round villages in batches to deliver the message of Bhoodan. He expected a good deal from them all, but most from the teachers and students. Teachers could study ideas in their true perspective and explain to the people the concept behind the Bhoodan movement. They had two months during the summer vacation, and could move from village to village during that period. He was not unaware of their hardships. Nevertheless, if they would work during the vacation they would gain in prestige and also become better teachers.

The Raja of Ranka, near Daltanganj, donated 2,500 acres of land in response to an appeal from one of the workers, and 11,000 acres to meet another worker's demand. Vinoba wished to know from the Raja the reason for the disparity between the two gifts.

"I gave as much as was asked for," he replied.

"Then how much will you give me?"

"As much as you command," was the gracious reply.

"How much land have you?"

"100,000 acres of *parti* (uncultivated) land and about 10,000 acres of *khud-jusht* (self-cultivated) out of which about 3,000 acres have already been allotted to the peasants."

"I generally demand one-sixth," observed Vinoba. "As, however, you pass on to me the responsibility of your estate, please give me the entire area of *parti* land and one-sixth of the other." The Raja bowed his head in acceptance. It was Buddha Jayanti day. At prayer time, Vinobaji referred in his speech to the magnificent donation and described it as a total gift, dedicated to Lord Buddha.

Arriving at Daltonganj on May 30, Vinobaji said he saw a great change in the atmosphere of the country.

When he had gone there six months ago, he had then talked of collecting ten to twelve thousand acres from a district. Now, however, they were talking of collecting hundreds of thousands of acres. People expected much from the movement and in turn they had also increased their demand from the people. "More and more workers are coming forward to help us in our task," he said. "Almost every political party in the country has expressed its sympathy and wishes us success in our endeavour. Doubts are still raised now and then; they are necessary and useful, too, in their own way, because doubts help to clarify and correct the views held about this work."

The followers of the Sarvodaya ideal sought now to introduce and impress upon the people the idea that possession of land or wealth in excess of one's needs was unethical. It was by no means a new concept. It was propounded centuries ago by the Rishis, or sages, of the past. "People do not regard the accumulation of wealth with the same amount of disapproval as stealing," said Vinoba. "We have now to create this feeling among the people." Non-possession was considered an attribute appropriate for holy men only. But it was equally helpful for the development and progress of people generally. It would not be possible to put an end to exploitation unless social life were reorganised on the basis of the principle of non-possession. This they had to do now. "It will begin," he said, "with the transformation of people's thought and belief, and will end by revolutionising society. The solution of the land problem on which we are now concentrating our efforts is the beginning of this social revolution. Our work will only be successful when we are able to get something from every peasant in every village as the token of his love and goodwill for this movement." An essentially religious idea could be preached only by a truly religious man. Bhoodan, therefore, demanded dedi-

cated workers. "When likes and dislikes and anger cease, when the desire for fruit no longer agitates man's mind, and when he undertakes action with perfect detachment in the spirit of duty, then only does he attain success in Karma yoga. We need workers of this type."

On June 14, when Vinobaji was at Natarhat, one of the highest spots in Bihar, the Raja of Palkot, convener of the Ranchi District Bhoodan Committee, came forward with land gifts for 45,132 acres of land, including his own donation of 44,500 acres. On the following day, 632 acres of land were received from 1,401 donors. It was a gift unprecedented in the Yagna so far. It encouraged Vinobaji to expound once more his views on the gospel of kindness, love and equality. "It is easy to bestow kindness and love. But equality may take longer." He therefore demanded only a part of people's land. The earliest Hindu religious hymns, the Vedas, say that "we should all live like brothers, equal brothers, elder or younger." In the present period of transition, however, there should be elder and younger brothers. We should know that "all of us are made of the same elements and when we depart we all become one with the earth. Then why should there be this disparity and class distinction?"*

* *Vinoba and His Mission*, p.111

Chapter Six

FORGING AHEAD FROM GIFT TO GIFT

VINOBAJI was still a sick man when he launched yet another and more strenuous method of giving. On June 16, 1953, he arrived at the village of Bishnapur and asked for spades and picks; he then went out and began to dig some dry ground about half a mile beyond the village. He set his companions, many of them peasants who had joined the march at some stage on the route, to the same task. In the furnace heat of this summer morning he himself dug for seventeen minutes without stopping; he was sixty and a convalescent from malignant fever. This was Vinobaji's inauguration of the "gift of labour" (*shram dan*). After this—except during the heaviest period of the rains—the digging of gift land became part of the daily programme. The chant of the workers became popular throughout the Bihar countryside:

Bhai kudali chalate chalo,
Mitte ka sona banate chaho.

Brothers, set the picks a-swinging,
Turn the good earth into gold.

Every day during those first few months, Vinobaji increased the party's digging stint by one minute. He himself always took part in it. He was still able to put many younger men to shame, rising at 3.45 a.m. for his morning prayers and half an hour later setting out on the road.

Now he was covering seven to eight milas a day, only half the distance he used to cover before his attack of fever. But this was his only real concession to illness. After reaching his destination each day he would rest awhile before going out to dig, then return to bathe and afterwards spend a period reading. At 2 p.m., when the sun burns at its fiercest, he was ready for interviews and discussions which would often last for three hours, until it was time for evening prayers. At about half-past eight Vinobaji would retire to his bed.

Bihar remained the great challenge. Early in July, nine months after Vinobaji's first solemn declaration that he would not leave the province until its land problem was solved, bhoodan workers from 15 districts of Bihar met at Ranchi. Vinobaji urged them to go out at once into the countryside and redouble their demands for gift deeds. He had asked for 800,000 acres of land from their territory and had so far received only 47,000. After spending a week in Ranchi, he returned to Hazaribagh, where in March the Raja of Dhanbad had been so generous. This time the Raja of Ramgarh was Vinobaji's companion throughout his trek in the district. When the party reached Padma, where the Raja had his palace, the princely family gave 200,000 acres, keeping for themselves only 300. Vinoba, of course, never saw an end to charity. "You are now my tame elephant," he said to the Raja. "The tame elephant catches other elephants for his master. From now on it will be your mission to catch for me other land donors as large-hearted as you are." The Raja, who was cheerfully digging every day in the "gift of labour" effort, soon found a fellow prince who gave Vinobaji another 100,000 acres.

Other well-to-do men were beginning to follow the example of the Raja of Ramgarh and were shouldering picks and shovels. "To-day," remarked Vinobaji one

evening after prayers, "the white-clothed gladly take part in the earth-digging programme. Times are changing; nowadays no one is likely to have very white clothes; our God is Krishna. Krishna means black, or the cultivator. A man who farms in India is necessarily black. . . . A new era is dawning in which all will work, and all will regard it as a sin to eat without having worked."

Vinoba has a deep understanding of his countryfolk, which is not surprising in view of his years of work for them. On June 29, he was in the Gaya district for the third time, gently—and successfully—appealing to a group of landlords not only to take back certain tenants whom they had evicted but also to give them some of their land. In the town of Gaya the Bhoodan Aid Committee, with the backing of many big landlords, vowed to raise its quota of 3,200,000 acres in land gifts. The Committee begged Vinobaji, for the sake of his health, to give up his daily marches and rest in Gaya for a while. Vinoba thanked them for their kind thought, but trudged on. To stop his activities, even for a day, was unthinkable. When he arrived at Hulaganj on August 9th, he was in a reminiscent mood and recalled that on that day in the year 1906 Dadabhai Naoroji had given to the country the ideal of *swaraj,* or self-government. Now that ideal had given place to another *Sarvodaya,* the fundamental feature of which was the problem of distribution of land. It did not mean breaking land and shattering society into pieces, but uniting hearts and binding together all the members of society.

As Vinoba walks, and then talks every evening, one can watch him developing his philosophy. His basic idea is as simple as goodness, but he grinds it with the concentration of a perfectionist, and endless sparks fly out. He discourses on the structure of Indian society, and it is easy to see why he is not always the friend of orthodox religion.

On September 11th he said that the days of kings and rich landlords were over. This was the age of comradely love. The world now belonged to the common people, and their voice would be supreme. The present age demanded equality—but equality as between friends. Merit must certainly receive due recognition, but the relationship between individuals should be of comradely equality. The values that existed when Tulsidas wrote his *Ramayana* could not be accepted to-day. Then, a Brahmin was credited with innate superiority; now he could not claim that superiority as a birthright. . . . Bhoodan was just an expression of the times; otherwise landlords would not have responded to his appeals. As it was, he had no need to feel grateful to those who gave land; he could go to them frankly and tell them that the land was not theirs in the first place. "We can insist that there are as many gifts of land as there are landlords. If you set out to awaken a sense of ethical duty in the people, in order to implement the demand of the age, your words must be irresistible." Vinobaji asked his workers everywhere to explain that this was the age of comradely love, and he was sure that then their mission would succeed.

The note of certainty may sound naïve; but Vinobaji was trying to tell independent India what she had declared in her constitution to be the truth for herself. On September 19, when Vinoba was at Deoghar, famous for its Baidyanathan temple, he had a shocking experience of what he called the curse of *Bhedasar,* the devil in man that makes him discriminate between human beings. It was not his practice to go to a temple that was not open to Harijans (untouchables). Having, however, received from the head-priest of the temple an invitation to visit the shrine and the assurance that he was agreeable to admit Harijans accompanying Vinobaji and his party, he

went there with some of them. Hardly had they proceeded a few steps when they were set on by a number of temple priests, who shouted, "Long live orthodoxy! Down with irreligion!" The attackers wielded poles, and the sarvodaya workers closed in a ring round Vinobaji to protect him from injury. Several of them were badly beaten, but thanks to their courage and devotion Vinobaji emerged from the struggle as calm as ever; apart from one blow on the ear he escaped injury. Next day he issued a press statement declaring that his attackers had acted out of ignorance and that he did not want to see any of them punished. His girl disciples had been attacked as well as the men, but the tenor of Vinobaji's words was as calm as ever. "We received as a blessing," he said, "beatings from the hand of Mahadevji's devotees. . . ." He was happy to find that the several hundreds of the companions who were with him remained calm throughout the attack. . . . Some of them, who had been badly battered, told him that at no time did they feel angry. "I feel it is symbolic of God's grace to this country to have workers who bear no ill-will against anybody." After recalling that Gandhiji too had been attacked at this temple, Vinoba said that although he did not want anyone punished, a recurrence of such incidents must be prevented. The Constitution of free India had clearly been violated. . . . In his opinion it would not be wrong if the government were to decide to take over such places of worship. This was an age of science. Every faith was being tested on the touchstone of reason. . . . "If our society keeps this in mind, and behaves accordingly, everything will go well."

During November a visiting artist and journalist, Frank Horrat, spent several days with Vinobaji. A summary of some of the questions and answers that passed between the two men (recorded by Damodardas Mundada) brings out some of the practical ideas behind Vinoba's beliefs, and

also illustrates the gap which divides him from Western thought.

Q.—You say that parliamentary democracy should be abolished and that instead laws should be made by common approval. You also suggest other political and economic changes, such as the abolition of money. I do not understand whether you mean that these changes should be made now, when people are as they are—some good, some bad; or if you think these changes should come only after a moral regeneration?

A.—I believe that men are substantially good; and our movement is striving for the moral regeneration of mankind. But we suggest that reforms in the systems of voting should be introduced now without waiting for general improvement. Otherwise we might have to wait for thousands of years. Moreover, the idea of unanimity of consent should not be taken literally. I believe that legislative and executive powers should be decentralised as far as possible in favour of the villages. Laws passed in village assemblies by a majority of one would not be accepted.

Q.—You say that laws should not be forced upon an unwilling minority. Does this apply also to certain laws made in India? For instance, the prohibition laws in Bombay and Madras? Do you approve of these laws as enacted now?

A.—There are certain points about which there might be disagreement between the majority and minority. In these cases the minority might publicly defend its point. When this is the position, I feel that the majority should not enforce its will on the minority. But in India the case of alcoholism stands on a different footing. In the same way that there could be no political party defending the right to commit robbery, there is no party in India standing officially against prohibition. Even people addicted to

drinking alcohol admit that it is bad. The position might be different in other countries, such as America, where elections are held on wet and dry issues.

Q.—You approve of certain forms of machinery and science, such as typewriters or aeroplanes. You do not approve of other forms of machinery, such as textile mills. How do you draw the line between one and another? Does not every kind of machinery injure or inconvenience some classes? Trains might be ruinous for camel drivers and typewriters for scribes?

A.—I think there are three kinds of machines; time-saving machines, which do work that cannot be done in any other way, like aeroplanes and radio. We are in favour of this kind of machine. Then there are destructive machines and of course we are against them. The third kind, such as textile machinery, could be called productive. We are not against them. Only we feel that they should be introduced gradually and without causing unemployment and large population shifts. I think that the spinning wheel, a *charkha,* is an ideal solution for our country at the moment, though not for every country and every time.

Q.—Do you think the use of the spinning wheel should be a voluntary occupation for those who want it? In that case those who have not the time or wish to work it should be free to produce mill-made clothes. Or do you hold that the *charkha* should be protected by law, by the imposition of taxes on mill-made cloth?

A.—I do not want to destroy the industries that already exist in the towns, and they certainly should have the right to go on working for the city populations and perhaps for export. But the manufactured goods should not be forced on anyone. Villagers should be free to place barriers against industrial textiles and manufactured foods. As a matter of principle, I feel that it would be a good thing

for all to find the time and have the ability to produce their own food and clothing.

Q.—I feel that some of your followers wish to see some *bhoodan* principles enforced by law. For instance, *charkha* and land distribution. These reforms would then have to be enforced by a majority against the minority, with the usual help of law and police. Would you approve of such a step?

A.—I don't think our principles should be enforced on anybody. Actually what we are doing in *bhoodan* is not to accept any gift of land or money without being sure that the donor understands the idea of it.

Q.—I feel that the principle of *bhoodan* and non-violence could bring a lot of help and improvement to western nations, especially in such under-developed countries as Italy and Spain. Do you have any particular idea about the way western countries might follow, to be in line with *bhoodan?*

A.—The principles of *bhoodan* and non-violence are universal and apply to the whole of mankind. But I believe that we in India might succeed more easily and much faster than people in western countries. In India people still follow the voice of their hearts, and in the villages the tradition of mutual help is still a living force. In the West, people tend to follow their brains. On the other hand, I believe very much in science. Perhaps by its own excesses science will bring a change of heart to the West.

On November 19, Vinobaji entered Purnea district at Kursals. The Maharaja of Darbhanga, whose wealth is renowned throughout north India, called on him with a gift of nearly 120,000 acres of land, and a promise of more to come. Lesser people contributed about 30,000 acres. The Maharaja promised to do his best to persuade

other landlords to participate in this sacrificial giving. Here Vinobaji made an appeal for organisation among the landless workers so that they would not be so weak as to give way to threats or temptations by landlords.

The end of the year 1953 found Vinobaji still walking, and on December 20, at Manaharapatti, he was philosophising on the virtue of walking. We live in an age of speed, he said, but in the past, when men's destination was a sacred place and their purpose spiritual gain, they travelled on foot. They trudged great distances, to such places as Kashi, Kedernath, and Jagganathpuri, and they did not feel tired. They knew the sense of joy and liberation that comes to people who throw off worldly cares and dedicate themselves to a religious purpose. In olden days they went in groups, singing hymns and sharing one another's knowledge and experience. But to-day men travel by train or plane, and are conveyed to their destination like parcels. Since people make no effort to acquire the right frame of mind, and the inner vision in which alone the Lord reveals himself, they do not receive His blessing, but only the blessing of the temple priests. They worship the priests, not God, and therefore gain nothing. Their lives remain bogged in ignorance and attachment to worldly things. People often asked him why he went about on foot. During the fifteen months he had been in Bihar he could easily have travelled the whole of India, had he gone by rail. His reply was that he lived and had his being in the old world, when people lived long and peaceful lives, depending for the regulation of their mutual relations on love, not on laws as at present. Others asked him, said Vinoba, whether his ceaseless wandering was in quest of a place where he might find God. He would answer: "My God does not live in any one place, neither in Kahirasagar nor on Mount Kailas. My God lives in every human heart; he pervades all space and every tiniest object." He

had given almost the same reply to his schoolboy friends long ago, in Baroda.

During the New Year Vinobaji camped for two weeks at Madhubani, in Darbhanga district, the most important centre in Bihar for the production of homespun cloth, "*khadi*." He soon found *khadi* more important than temple priests. "Your offerings of money at the temples are no good at all. You can stop them and instead spend the money on the purchase of homespun, which will be a real offering to God." Earlier he had said that *bhoodan* and *khadi* were one and inseparable, like Sita and Rama. Then, "What are we to do about unemployment caused by the textile mills? The unemployed must be fed. Hand-weaving feeds them, and at the same time produces cloth for the country. Even if it costs more than machine-woven cloth, remember that it goes to the poor. It is a form of charity, and therefore highly praiseworthy."

In this district, the most populous in India (about 3,600,000) Vinobaji set his demand at 300,000 acres, asking for a gift of land from every home. In his sermons he continued to make uncomfortable digs at the orthodox. On December 30, speaking at Sinhvada, Vinobaji urged landlords and other employers of labour to shed their consciousness of ownership and think of themselves as "servants of the servants." The disparity between them had to be wiped out, and also the inequality between men and women. The philosophy of *Sarvodaya* did not recognise any distinction between the rights and duties of men and women. All over the world society and politics had been fashioned by men, and they had made a complete mess of it. It was time that woman entered the field and introduced the purifying influence of non-violence. This was said at a time when the Hindu Code Bill, with its controversial items favouring divorce and property rights for women, had been shelved by an embarrassed govern-

ment in Delhi, in face of strong parliamentary opposition.

After his stay at Madhubani, Vinobaji spent another two weeks in the Patna district, part of the time in the Bihar capital itself, privately urging the state's Chief Minister and members of his Cabinet to persevere with their promises to contribute to the sacrificial giving. Then, on the thirtieth of January, 1954, the sixth anniversary of Gandhiji's death, he again entered Gaya district, on his fourth and most solemn pilgrimage. The humblest of all Bapu's disciples was now the head of the family of Gandhian workers. When he spoke that day, there were great crowds to hear his moving words: "To-day I am entering Gaya district again. Those who came to receive me wished to garland me. I presented their garlands to them instead, which means that they took up the banner of revolution and promised that they would, in the words of Bapu, either do this work or die. To-day is Bapu's anniversary. He taught us the maxim 'do or die,' and passed away after serving humanity to the end. There was no vestige of self-interest in his work. With a burning faith in God, and with the words 'Ram Ram' on his lips, he was walking to the prayer ground, but before he could even reach it he was struck down."

Vinobaji felt now, he said, that all who believed in Gandhi were on trial. The eyes of all India were upon Gaya. Did the workers realise their responsibility? "I say that everybody has to suffer in this mission, because it is Sacrifice. We have not come here to consume butter. We must consume our self-interest, our attachment to worldly things, our lust and greed. That is my message of love to-day."

Four days later the Council (Serv Seva Sangh), meeting at Wardha, recognised the urgency of Vinobaji's words and passed a special resolution: "The grimness of Sri Vinobaji's determination and the seriousness of the situation

are evident from the tone and language of his appeal to do or die. . . . The responsibility of the workers in Bihar and especially in the district of Gaya is now even greater. The Council therefore earnestly appeals to the workers and the people of Bihar to strive towards the quota for Gaya with redoubled determination. What Vinobaji has said regarding Gaya district applies to the whole of India." A special appeal was made to constructive workers to curtail their routine activities for the time being and devote all their time and energy to *bhoodan.* The mood of the Council might appear to be that of desperation, but was in fact that of heightened devotion. It is a remarkable trait of the bhoodan workers that none of them at any time seems to contemplate failure.

Vinobaji was no longer either a freak or a saint. His mission, which doubters had early derided, now had serious critics everywhere. A group of American correspondents came to meet him during this stay in Gaya, and were told: "Science and violence go ill together, as they will destroy society. Scientists should have the courage to refuse to sell their intellects. They must get together and tell their governments that they will not allow themselves to be exploited for destructive purposes. That does not mean that I want to check the progress of science." But most of the seekers after truth came from nearer home. After sixteen months Bhoodan workers had collected more than 1½ million acres in Bihar, but many doubted whether land so freely given could be of good quality. "To that," Vinobaji observed, "my answer is that we are getting as good land as there is in the country. The Ganges does not turn back the inferior streams which join it. Not all the land that has been given to us is good, but a major part is excellent. Suppose that only half of the land is good, we shall still be able to provide for at least 1,200,000 individuals, who at present have nothing to rely on, and give

them a permanent source of livelihood." The donors were asking what they were to get in return for their generosity. Nothing material, Vinobaji told them; only God's blessings, the goodwill of their poorer brethren, and that inner satisfaction which is of more value than anything material. "Some people say that in an age in which evil triumphs over good, we cannot hope to get gifts from everyone. This is a plea of inaction and despair. . . . The character of an age depends on what one makes of it. The age in which Ram lived was also that in which Ravana lived, but Ram succeeded in giving his character to his age. Mahatma Gandhi gave his character to this age. Each man fashions his own age by the way he lives and acts."

At Telpa, on February 8th, Vinoba underlined the fact that his message was for the rich as much as for the poor. He did not want only to collect land, but to engender universal love. "I would like my position to be that of the priest at the marriage ceremony. The priest is not expected to seek out the boy or the girl, he is only called in to bless the wedding. In the same way it is for the great landowners to discover the landless. I should then be called in to bless this union of hearts." The rich were not entirely convinced. Vinobaji was asked whether taking one-sixth from landowners who possessed hundreds of acres, and the same fraction from peasants who might own less than an acre, really made for equality. He answered: "When the poor decide to give land, it has a tremendous effect on the minds of the rich. . . . We can then demand more than one-sixth from the rich. We can say to them, God has given you more, therefore you can spare more."

Professor N. R. Malkani spent a few days at Gaya, and put a more precise question: "Considering that there are about 50 million landless agriculturists (including families) in India, don't you agree that your proposed distribution

of five acres per family, which may include dry or inferior land, will hardly suffice for bare existence?"

Vinobaji answered: "I agree that an allotment of five acres per family will barely yield enough food during a normal season. But land will at least give food to the hungry and fulfil a primary want. I expect, however, that the land will be improved so as to yield better crops, as in Japan. We must produce more if we are to live. . . . I imagine that even those who give *bhoodan* out of their tiny holdings will labour in order that their remaining land may give the same yield as before. I consider the poorest to be soldiers for a cause, and I take a little out of the little they have. The poor must help the poor to rise. Their charity and goodness will infect the prosperous. . . . As we plan to produce more, we must not forget to plan what to produce. Food and clothing are our primary wants and must have priority over betel and tobacco. That will increase our real income in terms of healthy consumption. High monetary incomes are secondary."

This was talk on a national level. A nervous and practical group of small landowners put a number of questions to Vinobaji, which illustrate the hard everyday problems of the Indian countryside:

Q.—Do you want the peasantry to rule?

A.—I want neither peasantry nor labourers to rule; I am anxious to see that the peasant labourers and landowners love one another, and that there is peace and happiness in the village. I want the land problem of the villagers to be solved by the villagers themselves. . . . Those who have no land should be provided with it first, and if more is available it should be offered to those with less than five acres.

Q.—But will the agricultural labourers come to work in our fields after we have given them their own land?

A.—Yes. Certainly they will come and work. Indians are grateful by nature. Out of love they will be ready to serve.

Q.—Suppose we let them cultivate all our land. Won't it then be enough if we give them one-sixth of the crop?

A.—No. That would be exploitation. There must be outright gifts, which are acts of love. The terms you suggest are so much in your favour that even the government would not accept the compromise.

Q.—We have land; they have the capacity to work. Why shouldn't one complement the other?

A.—I want only gifts. Out of love for your brothers, be pleased to offer land as a gift. If they come later to work in your fields, give them work.

Q.—Then we will only give what we think we should give. Why should you insist on the share being one-sixth?

A.—I am asserting their right. I don't ask for ownership of land, for none has the right to possess it. I say they should get a sixth share as if they were the sixth in a family which already has five sons.

Q.—Shouldn't that son also be one who serves the father?

A.—He has been serving you all along. His children are your grandchildren. But we have been looking after them while it was really your duty to bring them up.

Q.—But they will never come to work for us after they get land.

A.—Why not? We are not giving them vast estates. After farming their own small patch they will gladly come to work in your fields. They won't lose anything by that; indeed, they will gain.

Q.—Suppose we do give them land. They will just

accept it and walk off. They may go and work under another landlord. How do we benefit then? But if, instead of giving land, we offer a loan of Rs. 100 the person who receives it will feel indebted, and will respect us.

A.—The object of my work is not to give you the kind of benefit you seem to want. If I do not take up the cause of the landless, they will in time stand up for themselves and claim their right in a very different manner. And far worse consequences will follow. In making gifts, there is no question of pressure. But in the loan you talk of there is an element of indirect coercion. If you feel disposed to give, give what you can. The landless will certainly be grateful to you, and will serve you in return for service rendered.

Q.—Didn't Gandhiji render service throughout his life? And what happened to him in the end? He was shot down!

A.—True. But you cannot refuse to serve on that account. If you turn your back on this movement, do you think you will be let off, while the poor go on living as they do now?

Q.—Well then, will they promise us in writing that they will come and work in our fields after we have given them land?

A.—Why should they promise in writing? I will give you a written undertaking myself, but what does it matter? Your wife is there by your side. When you married her did you take a written pledge from her that she would serve you? The great thing is the relationship—it is love that sustains it. You demand a written agreement from them. All right, suppose they give it. Will you too give a similar undertaking that you will always give them work?

Someone in the crowd said, "Yes"; Vinoba pressed him

hard. "You say 'yes,' but suppose your son says to-morrow that he wants to cultivate his share of your land by himself? Can you say 'no'? Then where is your contract?"

"Very well," said the questioner resignedly, "we take it that you will accept whatever we decide to offer you."

"Come on then," challenged Vinobaji. "How much will you give?"

One landowner offered one-twentieth of his property. "If you think," Vinobaji told him, "that one-twentieth of what you possess is sufficient to solve the problem of your village, I shan't object to receiving it. But if it is found that more is required, more will have to be given. Everyone of the landless has to be provided for. I would ask you to bear this in mind, and leave you to divide the land accordingly."

Not only were the economists, the journalists and the cornered rich of Bihar taking Vinobaji seriously, but others much more eminent. On February 6, 1954, far south at Kanjirapalli in Travancore, a special training camp for *bhoodan yagna* was opened; Pandit Nehru made the inaugural speech. "The *bhoodan* movement," he said, "has unquestionably become a powerful factor in India. What is really important is not the actual acreage of land obtained but the new spirit infused into the minds of the people. You should not expect the *bhoodan* movement to solve the problems of the landless. That would be casting on you workers a responsibility that ought to be taken by those in charge of the government. But the movement has changed the atmosphere in India in regard to this question. Thereby it has not only helped directly to solve the problem to some extent, but indirectly it has also induced the government and others to attempt some satisfactory solution."

But just as the politicians could not ignore Vinobaji, he

himself found it increasingly impossible to ignore politics. It was his fourth visit to Gaya. "In Gaya this time," he announced, "I am beginning a new chapter of bhoodan work, a chapter of research into the method of setting up the most effective organisation for our work." Such an organisation could not be entirely divorced from the political scene. More and more, during this tour of Gaya, Vinobaji's reflections dwelt on both the internal and the international political situation. At Barun, on March 2nd, he spoke of the Indian people's great responsibility to show other nations the way to world peace. "America," he observed, "desires to send aid to different countries in Asia so that under her patronage the world may be strong. But we feel that her offers of military aid will endanger peace. Pakistan thought it desirable to accept military aid from America. Of course one has to think and decide for oneself. . . . But if India imitates Pakistan she will certainly invite danger not only to herself but to the whole world."

It was not enough, he said, for people simply to say that they wanted no help from outside. They had to work, and work in right earnest. They had to make their country strong in the real sense. "A nation will become really strong," he said, "only when it is free from international conflicts, becomes self-sufficient, and boasts a people united by bonds of love." A country thus fortified, said Vinobaji, would be immune from any threat of danger, and its greatness would have an influence far beyond its frontiers. Thus Indians might save not only themselves but the whole world. Of course they could only do so if God made them instruments for His work. If by His grace they could calmly continue to demonstrate love and non-violence; work for village self-government and abolish unemployment; sacrifice what was necessary

and live together as one single family; then they might reasonably hope that violence would not prevail in this world.

Shun idleness. Increase production. Abolish all class distinctions. Make sacrifices for your neighbours. Love one another. End poverty. Day after day, mile after mile, Vinobaji hammered home his points. Especially, he stressed that poverty must be ended. He had seen, though he hardly needed to see, the report of Suresh Ramabhai on the district where the bhoodan yagna training camp had recently been started at Kanjirapalli, a region full of spreading estates, and plantations of rubber, tea, cardamom and pepper. "There was one scene which one can never forget," Ramabhai had written. "An old man with withered cheeks and greyish hair and dressed in a ragged cloth wrapped round his waist, had a long thin piece of string attached to a tiny coconut shell. With this he was drawing up water that oozed from a small opening, about eight inches in diameter, in a bigger hole that was about two feet across. With unwearying patience he went on filling his so-called jug, made of coconut leaves! I wondered whether anyone could explain to him the Five Year Plan or the *bhoodan yagna* movement. . . ."

There were scenes just as pathetic in Bihar as in Travancore. Such poverty, Vinobaji believed, could be ended only by everyone subscribing to the five gifts: the gift of love, the gift of wisdom, the gift of labour, the gift of wealth and the gift of land. His hopes were undiminished and his demand as importunate as ever. He had now been tramping Bihar for eighteen months.

Chapter Seven

THE CALL OF BODH GAYA

ON THE MORNING of March 6th, a fervent admirer of Vinobaji and an intimate friend of Jayaprakash Narayan, who wished to watch the work of the Bhoodan Yagna at close quarters, was seen rushing in a jeep towards Jayaprakash, who had established himself after his act of life-dedication in the countryside of Gaya. Ever since they were companions in suffering, imprisoned for taking part in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1932, when they had formed the idea of starting the Congress Socialist Party with themselves as co-secretaries, Jayaprakash and Minoo Masani had been close companions and colleagues in many patriotic causes. To-day, although they no longer collaborate as members of the Socialist Party, and have abjured active politics for the time being, owing to vicissitudes each has gone through during the last two decades, they remain close friends. Before paying his respects to Vinobaji, Masani wished to acquaint himself with the work done in the district. He did not find Jayaprakash at Jahanabad, however, but in the little village of Kalpa, about five miles away. Through little lanes, between rows of huts in the village, the jeep was piloted till it came to a stop outside the village library. On its veranda sat, like a lamb, the lion of the thirties whom despite all their might the British had failed to tame until the last day of their domination. He was having a conference with leading inhabitants of the village before a reception arranged in his honour.

Soon afterwards everyone moved towards a plot of

ground on the outskirts of the inhabited area which was decorated with flags and bunting. Gradually, the crowd collected at the meeting place. The proceedings opened with a song about *Bhoodan Yagna* sung by a young woman law graduate of the University of Madras. A young man from the village then got up and read an address of welcome to Jayaprakash. Responding to the welcome, he adroitly stressed the fact that what he wanted was not addresses but gift deeds. Masani spent two days with Jayaprakash, going with him on foot from village to village listening to his speeches. He was deeply impressed by the simplicity and directness of Jayaprakash's appeal and his accounts of this visit show how the message of Bhoodan is being carried from village to village. "We live," Jayaprakash would start by saying, "in an age of moral corruption. God made man to be happy, but man has departed from the divine path which leads to happiness in another's joy and sadness in another's sorrow." He would then compare the behaviour of human beings with that of dogs scrapping for a bone, each for himself. Referring to the panic of pilgrims at Allahabad, where some people from Gaya district had gone, he would say, "Some people go to the Ganges to wash off their sins and get purified. But the Ganges is right here and purification can also be had at home. If you wish to be purified, you do not have to go all the way to Allahabad."

Having thus started by making a moral appeal to his listeners, Jayaprakash would come down to earth and stress the fact that this was an era of change: "You see profound changes taking place around you in the world. The British raj which you knew for many years has gone; so have the Maharajas. The rich landowner who was with you till the other day has also gone." Then he would ask: "Do you think the world will remain as it is for eternity? I can assure you that is not the nature of the Universe, in

which there is constant change. For one thing, the landless will not let it rest as it is. Some people have too much land, while others have none. Land must and will be more justly redistributed. Further, changes must come one way or the other."

Turning then to other countries in the world, particularly to Russia and China, Jayaprakash would point out how certain changes had come about there. "In Russia they came with violence, brutality and murder. They have done no one any good." He would point out that in Telengana (South India) a similar effort resulted in at least three thousand people being killed and millions of rupees worth of property being destroyed. "The bigger revolution is to bring about change peacefully and through love," he would urge. "Let those with much land give away the surplus; let the middle peasants give away a sixth part of their land, and let even the poor give just a tiny bit as a token of their participation."

Answering those who asked why they should not wait for a law to be passed for the redistribution of land, Jayaprakash would say: "Certainly, let laws be passed to redistribute the land fairly. But what merit is there for the man who waits to be dispossessed by virtue of law? What merit is there for the landlord who has been expropriated by law? Does anyone remember his name or sing his praises? Do you need a law to be passed before you desist from theft? There is little difference between the sword and the law. Both are coercive." Jayaprakash would then seek to reassure his listeners that he was not trying to frighten them into parting with their land under threat of violent dispossession. "Don't think I am threatening you. As Vinobaji says, I am awakening you from sleep to warn you of a snake nearby."*

It was thus impressed on the audience that Bhoodan

* Article by M. R. Masani in *Encounter*, December 1954.

was a great mass movement of conversion, and the creation of a new climate of thought and values of life, a movement that had brought about a living and immediate revolution In the minds of men and in their mutual relationships. Bhoodan did not aim at capturing the state in order to use it for its own ends. As a corollary, it did not wish to create or become a political party in order to capture the state. It aimed rather at persuading the people to carry out a revolution in society, and at creating those conditions in which the people might manage their affairs directly, without the mediation of parties and parliaments.

Gandhism, like anarchism or communism, visualises ultimately a stateless society. Not only in its totalitarian form but also in its welfare aspect the modern state is assuming larger and larger powers. In the name of welfare it threatens, as does the totalitarian state, to enslave man. "The people must cry halt to this creeping paralysis," said Jayaprakash. "The fact that it is set up by them does not affect the matter. The device of democratic elections cannot equate 500 representatives with 180 million (counting only the adults) people. To the extent that the 180 million look after their affairs directly, the powers and functions of the state are restricted and real democracy is practised."

At a village meeting at Surungapur, an attempt to heckle Jayaprakash was deftly turned into an opportunity to lash the advocates of a "real class struggle." Just as he was going to start speaking, a handbill was placed in his hands which had been issued over the name of the Jahanabad Democratic Youth League and the Jahanabad Kisan Sabha. The title of the leaflet was "Beware of the net of illusion of Bhoodan Yagna. Whose friends are Vinobaji and 'revolutionary Socialist' Jayaprakash?" The leaflet went on to malign Vinobaji and Jayaprakash, and to suggest that they were enemies of the peasants and had come to mis-

lead them and divert their attention from the real class struggle. A set of questions addressed to Jayaprakash by an anonymous questioner also reached the platform. The tenor of the questions was the same as that of the leaflet. Jayaprakash read the handbill and the list of questions to his listeners, and in answering the questions turned the tables on the mischief-makers. He had no use whatsoever, he said, for the kind of society that had come into existence in Russia and China. He disliked it one hundred per cent. What had the people in Russia got? Certainly not what Lenin had wanted. It was not the peasants and workers but those who controlled the Red Army and the Secret Police who were enjoying the fruits of the revolution. Stalin's era had been a reign of terror. People of the same type still ruled Russia after his death. In a dictatorship there could be no rule of the people, as there was in India under its democratic Constitution.*

Masani then started on his visit to Vinobaji, who was in the village of Paldih. The country track was in such a state of disrepair that at one point the jeep broke down. Reaching the village on March 9, he heard Vinobaji addressing a meeting. The directness and forthrightness of his appeal impressed him even more than that of Jayaprakash. The words which he used were simple and elemental and revealed the spiritual power of the saint as distinct from the magnetism of the political orator addressing audiences almost daily on political controversies. After the meeting Vinobaji spared the visitor an hour and a half, a rare honour, for a discussion on Bhoodan and other matters.

What transpired at the interview is recorded by Masani in a note. He explained at the outset his interest in Bhoodan Yagna and its wider significance, and mentioned discussions between Mr. J. R. D. Tata and Jaya-

* Ibid, p.12.

prakash about which Vinoba had already been informed. He referred also to his own article (August 15, 1953) in *Thought* magazine on "Bhoodan for Industry," in the course of which he made an appreciative reference to Gandhiji's concept of trusteeship. Asked to give his ideas in regard to the application of his principles to the field of industry, with particular reference to the points of difference that arose in certain circumstances, Vinobaji explained that in the first instance he could not be party to a process of industrialisation which resulted in the displacement of labour. This meant that, until the workers employed on handicrafts could be absorbed in large-scale production, certain fields of supply should not be taken over by machine production.

As regards the division of the fruits of industry, Vinoba's formula was:

1.—A fair return to be ensured to the worker, the manager and the investor.

2.—Of the net profits that remain after deducting these returns and after deducting income tax, one-sixth of the net profits to be set aside for the community. (Vinobaji would not agree that the income tax levied by Government could be included in the computation of this one-sixth share of the community.)

3.—In addition to this deduction at the source, each of the parties to industry to put aside for Sampattidan one-sixth of their expenditure as distinct from their income. This would ensure that savings would be free from a second imposition.

4.—Directors and managers to undertake some token manual work in addition to their normal functions, as a symbol of fraternisation with the ordinary worker. This might not be more than a few minutes a day, but it would

revolutionise the human relations between the boss and the man at the bench.

This formula appeared to Masani to be somewhat too drastic. It was suggested, among other things, that it might have the unfortunate result of retarding the capital formation so essential for the country. Vinobaji recognised the need for investment, particularly as he was against inviting too much foreign capital for investment. Human beings were capable of rising to great heights of selflessness, but nations collectively could only achieve a rather moderate average and could not therefore be wholly trusted to be disinterested.

It was explained to Vinobaji how Tatas had lived up to the concept of Trusteeship over several decades. 85 per cent of the profits of Tata Industries went to philanthropy. Masani asked whether, as a first step, the adoption of a Charter or Declaration of Faith by an industrialist agreeing to live up to his obligations to the community, the consumer and the worker, would not be acceptable to him. Vinobaji said he would not be satisfied with an abstract pledge of that kind. Something concrete was required. Otherwise, everyone would be prepared to sign it. Masani begged leave to disagree with him on this point, and he asked Vinobaji to visualise the pressure that would be exerted on a man who signed the declaration but who did not live up to it. Vinobaji did not state what concrete action he would suggest as a starting point. He would only say that signatories to such a pledge or charter should agree to something new which they were not already doing, and that this should apply to the best of them, like Tata. He would have liked to see some action taken to symbolise the acceptance by the employer of the fact that the worker and he formed part of the same

family. "Would the appointment of a Workers' Director on the Board of a Company meet his requirements?" Vinobaji said in reply to his question that he had nothing against the suggestion, but that it was too formal a manifestation. Some more human and direct way should be found. He wanted just one or two industrialists of some status to come forward as "Trustees" to enable him to embark on a campaign in industry similar to Bhoodan.

Vinobaji expressed his satisfaction that Masani had shown such interest in the movement, and said before the interview came to an end that he would try out with other industrialists the ideas that they had discussed.

The intelligence of villagers was the theme of Vinoba's talk at Chaubar (Gaya) on March 26. "They are quick in grasping things and are very thoughtful. They do not accept anything without mature consideration. That is why they have been able to withstand through all the centuries." When he saw them discussing and arguing, he tried to look into their hearts and found that they thought seriously, "turning the thing over in their minds and examining it in all its aspects." "They have the intelligence and intuition to judge things," he added. "And this is exactly what I want. I want them to think and come to a decision only after full consideration. I do not want them to donate land without being convinced of its utility."

A few landlords in the village asked Vinobaji to show them a model Bhoodan village. If it impressed them favourably, they too would share their lands with others. But unless people came forward to donate lands, and to afford an opportunity to reorganise the life of the village on Bhoodan lines, where was the model village to spring from? If everyone were to ask that he first be shown a model village before he considered the question of his co-operation, there could be no progress at all. It was for

everyone to come forward and work for setting up such models. Indeed, said Vinoba, "it is of the essence of our conception that local people themselves should build and control it." "Raise yourself by your own efforts" was the admonition of the Gita. "Raise yourself" meant "Raise your family and your village. All those with whom it is your lot to live together."

A friend had remarked that he found it hard to recognise as a gift what was merely a restoration of one's right. It might really be hard, "but people must understand," said Vinoba, "that in asking for land he was not asking for charity as beggars did." He was asserting a right. Man is a thinking being. If an effort were made to explain things to him in the right way, he was bound to understand eventually. That was an article of faith with Vinoba, and he wanted to adhere to it and to persist in taking the message to everyone as often as necessary. One thing was certain. Poverty could only be ended by a just redistribution of land and by everyone working on it in co-operation with others. Redistribution might involve fragmentation to some extent, but that need not worry anyone. "We are out to unite hearts," said he. "The union of hearts will lead also to union of hands; people will then co-operate with each other and increase production. The Vedas say, "Earn with a hundred hands and then distribute with a thousand." Let us then distribute all our riches with joyous abandon, pulling down the barriers which divide man and man."

The impossibility of controlling the use of instruments of violence was the subject-matter of Vinobaji's talk on March 30th. Referring to the controversy then going on in the press as to whether experiments with the Hydrogen Bomb should be carried out as contemplated by the U.S.A., Vinoba asked: "Why manufacture them at all if you are not going to experiment with them? If experi-

menting is banned, where is the sense in producing them? And why only the Hydrogen Bomb? Why not all other weapons?" Even those who believed in violence acknowledge the need of limiting its use. They forgot, however, that violence once let loose could not be controlled. In the Hindu scriptures the Mahabharata mentioned elaborate rules restraining warriors from recourse to unfair practices. But these rules were repeatedly infringed. This happened in spite of the fact that both camps included men of the highest eminence, as regards knowledge and integrity of character. "Why then were the rules broken? The reason is simple. Violence admits of no limit being imposed on it. One cannot guide it along a predetermined course. One may fix the limits beyond which one may not go and try to observe them, but when occasions arise which call for an unhindered use of violence the limits are swept away."

That was the lesson of the Mahaharata. The safest course was to abjure violence completely.

"Purification of the heart, the test of our work" was the text of Vinobaji's speech at Bajaura on April 6. Morally the people of India had remained much the same after independence as before. Greed had not left them. They were bound to suffer from worldly afflictions. The Bhoodan movement aimed essentially at purging individuals, and through them society, of faults which corrupted their national life and thereby hampered progress. It sought to reconstruct life on the basis of respect for God. People asked him why he did not get land redistributed through legislation. They also asked, "Why do you wander on foot? Why do you inflict all this torment on your body and also cause us so much uneasiness? Bring pressure on the Government, ask them to pass a suitable law, and that will be the end of the matter." "The law would no doubt take away surplus lands but," asked Vinoba, "will it release you from the bonds of attachment, a sense of

possession and pride? Can we enact and enforce a law to compel people to give up all pride, to discard feelings of superiority, to take to a life of sacrifice, and cast away greed? Can this be achieved by legislation? Surely, these are things which one must do oneself of one's free will!"

Why did he wander about on foot? "Because," he said, "I want to enter into your hearts, to contact your inmost soul and to influence your will from within. I want you to purify your hearts." People were giving lands in Bhoodan. The number of the donors was growing daily, and they were beginning to realise the importance and value of the movement. But more gifts of land could not alone bring satisfaction. The success of their efforts could be judged by one test only. Was there any lessening of attachment to property, of greed and of self-esteem? "Purification of heart comes about," he explained, "through contact with noble souls, men who have themselves realised it. That is why I go from village to village. I spend a whole day in even the smallest village and carry the message to the very door of the people." Such close contact with the people gave him the same joy as the vision of the Lord. How can one get such happiness from legislation? Legislation, even when it succeeds in transferring the land from the owners to the landless cultivators, may worsen the situation in some respects. It may cause disputes in every village, and endless litigation and trouble to everyone concerned. "But," said he, "if there is a change in your heart and you begin to distribute your land to your less fortunate brothers of your own free will, not as a miser does, but lovingly and generously as a father gives to his son, if you begin to serve them and share their joys and sorrows, all our present ills will soon melt away."

Six years after the Sarvodaya Brotherhood had been founded, the constructive workers from all parts of the

country, numbering 7,500 and representing all parties and all shades of thought, assembled at Bodh Gaya on April 18, the day on which the Bhoodan Yagna had come into being in Telengana three years earlier. April 18, said Vinobaji, would be a day as important to tillers of the soil in India as May Day to industrial labour all over the world. In the course of that historic session one gifted speaker after another raised the Conference to spiritual and philosophic heights. Vinobaji began with the Vedic prayer: "May we grow one in mind, one in heart, one in purpose!" Expressing his joy at seeing old familiar faces once more, he said he was anxious to see true unity of heart, and intimate contacts established among the members of the "Gandhi family." Bhoodan had proved a fruitful means of establishing such contacts. But it was his experience that, though they were all members of one family, their hearts were not so close to one another as they should have been. He had, therefore, to invite Jawaharlalji to the Conference and seek his co-operation in uniting all hearts.

"The caste system, which has been attacked from the time of Raja Rammohan Rai to that of Mahatma Gandhi," he said, "is again becoming stronger as a consequence of the methods of election." In view of the prevailing conditions of the country, should not changes be made in those methods? Much energy, money and time were wasted on the elections. Reforms should be made in the light of experience. He felt that no matter what differences existed in the ideas of good persons, they should join together in some public work. "On such programmes the country's power should be centralised," he suggested, "so that the common man may feel the impact. Bhoodan Yagna can be one such work. Other programmes may be added to it. For united action among men of different parties, deep

thinking is necessary, but there should be no contradictions once action has begun."

It seemed as if a new political teacher were emerging from the Brotherhood, concerned more with the spiritual than with the material aspects of India's political problems.

Reverting to the Bhoodan movement, Vinobaji observed that devotion which is blind, and intellect which demands reasoning, were both needed to promote the common programme. "I only know that the idea of Bhoodan was given to me by God," he said. "About 50 million acres are needed. In the beginning thinking did not help me. Then an inner voice came and warned me that if I yielded to fear, I would accept Communism. Thus the work began. Those who were doubtful have been reconciled. The Communists put out the rumour that I was an agent of the rich, but I always talked to them with love. They too want to do good to the poor." Their leader, Shri Gopalan, had said that though Communists did not like the Bhoodan way, they were not opposed to it. That was a change of heart.

Did Vinoba think that the land problem would be solved through Bhoodan? No. Before the problem was solved, he might be no more. Problems would exist as long as the world lasted. Now that the atmosphere was favourable, he thought they should think of other programmes along with Bhoodan. They should pay attention to the work necessary for its completion. Land is not merely a source of production, he said. It is a source of worshipping God. It is more important to work on the land than it is to perform penance. If the Harijans (Untouchables) were not allowed to enter the temples in Kashi it might not be a painful matter, but it would be positively grievous if they were not permitted to work on the land. "The worship of God, that is, service on the land," he urged, "must not be hin-

dered. Just as no one need have any hesitation in demanding water to drink, so no one prepared to work on the land should be ashamed of demanding a piece of land."

Three years of effort concentrated on the collection of land had created the necessary atmosphere for the sacrificial gift of wealth. The time for the redistribution of the land had also arrived. In sacred memory of Bapu, thought Vinoba, everyone who could spin should give at least a hank. That would be a vote for the Sarvodaya Brotherhood. There should be no one in India who did not know how to spin. "Just as swimming and rowing are an indispensable item in the programme of education in England," said he, "so should spinning be an integral part of the educational system of the country." This idea, he recalled, had been given to them by Gandhiji. In India unemployment was not such a big problem as underemployment. "Without spinning India's farmer will have no hope," he said, "therefore it should be compulsory for all. I consider it to be essential for India's security. If a person does not know how to spin, he must be taught. There should be certain priorities in carrying out the different programmes. The question of land comes first."

Pandit Nehru followed Vinobaji. He said in all humility that he was not there to guide anyone but to learn. The questions before them were not two or three. Thousands of problems faced the country. Goodwill and the desire to go forward unitedly might help them to solve those problems. Vinobaji had referred to the defects and difficulties of elections. India's intellectual recluse had observed them from a distance whereas the Prime Minister and others had been actually entangled in them. "There is no doubt," he said, "that there are defects. But although many evils like the caste system and provincialism do influence elections, India's experiment in adult franchise is unique in the world." It was not easy to do

away with elections in a democracy. If they cast aside their constitution, more and new defects might appear.

The first and foremost problem before the country was, without doubt, that of land, although in fact all problems were interrelated. "Vinobaji's movement," said Panditji, "is a revolutionary one. The main problem is how the Government can help in it." If the Government intervened, the character of the movement would be altered, because the hand of administration was usually heavy. As regards the question of making spinning compulsory in schools and colleges, Pandit Nehru had no objection in principle, but it was really a matter for the State Governments, which often held widely divergent opinions.

The philosopher Vice-President, Dr. Radhakrishnan, agreed that unity of mind, thought and purpose was lacking in India. Bhoodan, he believed, would not only bring about an economic and agrarian revolution, but could also set people on the path of divine progress. This would lead to the dissolution of barriers between castes and outcastes. Social coherence was the need of the hour.

At evening prayer that day, Vinoba was overwhelmed with gratitude for the response he had received during the past three years. During the first year he had worked "almost all alone." People do not embrace new ideas all at once. Yet he was surprised to find how quickly those whom he approached directly or indirectly had begun to understand the ideal behind Bhoodan. In Uttar Pradesh, he had a few colleagues working with him. Some of them left him, with his consent, to do election work. "My condition then," he said, "was exactly like that of a rich man who became absolutely poor and was left to himself by his relations. When the election fight was at its height and heat, a few friends even asked me to stop my programme for a couple of weeks. But I said: 'Aren't you the people living on the banks of the rivers Jumna and

Ganges? Do these rivers ever stop flowing? If they don't, why should I be asked to stop?' And I continued my march. People came in thousands, listened in rapt attention to the message and it went straight to their hearts."

In other provinces only individual Congressmen and Praja-Socialists had expressed their sympathy for the Bhoodan movement and had done something for it. But in Bihar, Vinobaji was thankful to acknowledge, the Provincial Congress Committee had taken a courageous and far-sighted step in accepting Bhoodan as their main work. They had issued a bold statement that they were determined to collect the full quota for the province. The Praja Socialist Party had also taken a similar decision. This had the desired effect throughout the country. The pledge, however, had to be fulfilled. It was the responsibility of everyone to proceed with the work at maximum speed. A very hopeful atmosphere had been created in the Province. He rejoiced that no one had said "No" when approached affectionately for Bhoodan. Everyone said "Yes" if he were made to understand the ideal behind the begging-bowl. Some gave more; some gave less. That was natural. Yet on the whole the experience he had had so far had made him feel confident of the future.

250,000 deed-gifts had been received. Within two or three days more was expected. It meant that the message of the Yagna had moved the hearts of 300,000 people. "One spoonful of buttermilk is enough to turn a big pot of milk into curds," he said. "These 300,000 people will act exactly like a spoonful of buttermilk to convert the rest of the population."

Blessed are the people who are united in fulfilment of a good cause. Vinobaji related how in Gokul-Brindhaven when Lord Krishna suggested to the inhabitants that they should use their hands and sticks to raise the Govardhan mountain, all of them at once applied their full and

combined strength. "Imagine," said he, "a mountain being lifted by human effort! The Lord was pleased to see their joint effort; He graced it by His touch and the mountain was lifted high. Any new force manifesting itself in society is a manifestation of God's power. The strength in one multiplied by five is not equal to the simple total five; it goes beyond it and becomes five times five. The new strength evident in our society is nothing but the power of the One above. Any work receiving the co-operation of all becomes a sacrifice of giving."

Sacrifice had to be made whenever people were faced with some misfortune. The motherland at the moment was in distress. There was suffering everywhere. To save the country from the conflict between capital and labour, lack of means of livelihood for the people and bickerings amongst the people of different castes and creeds, a sacrificial movement had been started. Whoever did not participate in it was a traitor to the country. Vinoba insisted that every owner of land, big or small, should offer his or her deed-gift. Even 99 per cent would not suffice, he declared. "Cent per cent should be forthcoming." Then only could it be said that his message was accepted.

By this time it had become clear to Vinoba that once people understood his message they would not refrain from offering a gift. In Palamu district about 12 villages had offered their entire land. "Gopa Babu tells me," he said, "that in Orissa some 15 to 16 villages executed gift deeds of their entire lands. The Mangroth village in Uttar Pradesh offered all the lands of their village. Are the people of these villages angels or chosen messengers of God? No, they are ordinary human beings just like you and me. This new ideal has gripped them."

The country would be free only when each and every individual of his own free will offered his share. "Independence" meant that every individual would feel that the

country was his, that nobody could oppress anyone, that none had any reason to be afraid of anyone. In such a state every individual would become self-disciplined and would do his work himself without becoming the slave of another.

On the second day of the Conference there was a departure from the usual routine. Instead of a joint discussion there were group discussions under five heads: (1) growth and development of Bhoodan; (2) problem of land distribution; (3) training of workers; (4) the sacrificial offering of wealth and (5) village reconstruction.

In the afternoon session the conveners of the Bhoodan Committees of some states gave an account of work done in their respective states. The audience listened with joy to the thrilling story of Mangroth village in the Hamirpur district of Uttar Pradesh. Its inhabitants were the first to donate their entire lands, in May 1952. The members of the Sarvodaya Mandal of the village, consisting of 16 members, to whom Vinobaji had entrusted the management of Mangroth, also presented themselves before the Conference.

Then followed a speech by Jayaprakash Narayan, which marked the highlight of the Conference. Baba had been very generous in acknowledging the response to his appeal. But was it adequate? As one who had dedicated his life to the service of the motherland, and had recently given all his time and energy to the work of Bhoodan, he had seen what a wide gulf there had been between promise and performance. At the outset, therefore, he expressed his deep regret, as a Bihari, that Bihar had not yet fulfilled Baba's demand. He felt certain that Bihar could do it. But neither the Congress Party nor the Praja-Socialist Party, both of which had passed resolutions supporting Baba's call for 32 lakhs of acres, had taken up the work with the necessary zeal

and spirit. His own faith in the efficacy of the movement was growing day by day. The paramount need was to dedicate one's whole life to this cause and he called upon his countrymen, especially the youth, to come forward and give their lives to it.

Then in simple, stirring accents he announced in all humility the dedication of his life to the cause. This moving dedication came with a wealth of inspiring suggestions and stimulating influence. The force of his appeal for dedication lay not merely in the intensity of the desire to serve but also in the warmth of emotion and the longing of the soul of the man from whom it came. Great ideas and great resolves reflected in great slogans may carry away masses of men, as happened when the cry of liberty, equality and fraternity incited thousands to rise in the French Revolution. It is, however, only when the deepest feelings and emotions of men are stirred, and their higher selves aroused, that dedication to a spiritual cause releases latent resources of spiritual strength. Such was the spontaneous response to the quickening appeal of Jayaprakash that afternoon for a peaceful revolution. It also made every Bihari rejoice at the success of Vinobaji's mission in the land of Lord Buddha. It seemed as if the spirit of the Blessed One was brooding over the proceedings of the Conference and inspiring the people to participate devoutly in the great Sacrifice of Giving. With the blessing of the Lord Buddha and the goodwill of the Government of Bihar; with the fervent devotion of its Chief Minister, Nabakrushna, to the cause, and his untiring efforts to make Vinobaji's tour in Bihar fruitful; and with the lead given by so thoughtful and popular a leader as Jayaprakashbabu, Bhoodan had gathered more momentum in this state than anywhere else.

Chapter Eight

THE LIFE DEDICATION OF JAYAPRAKASH

THE THIRD DECADE of the twentieth century in India opened with a revolutionary change in the attitude of the people towards the rulers of the day. Anti-British feeling was growing and steadily spreading from Congress politicians to the population, which was becoming more and more conscious of the injustice and economic and political difficulties inseparable from alien domination. The conflict between the "moderates" and the "extremists" of the era had ended in the virtual withdrawal of the "old world politicians" from the arena of Congress politics. They had adhered and were still adhering to what was ridiculed by the leftists as their "mendicant policy" of constitutional agitation for self-government under British paramountcy, whereas Young India demanded complete independence. To achieve freedom, the young rebels insisted not only on a vigorous programme of subversive action and a boycott of British goods and council, but also on the use of force and of lawless action, open or disguised, whenever possible. Such a change in the temper of the people marked a dangerous phase in the political situation of the country, much more alarming than when the monster of anarchism had raised its head in Bengal at the dawn of the century. The unimaginative bureaucracy on the spot, however, still saw no menace to British supremacy. Still relying on the might of its military machine and the efficacy of its administrative and legislative machinery, still cherishing the hope of dividing the people and

ruling the country, it believed it could offer palliatives for self-government and put off for a good long time the evil day of transfer of power to the people. The prevailing unrest suddenly flared up into flames with the "crawling order," following on the heels of the Jallianwallah Baug atrocities.

This was the opportunity for Bapu to raise the standard of revolt. On his return to India from South Africa, he had refrained from taking an active part in politics and confined his activities to the sphere of social service. But the indignity to India's manhood implied in that order was a challenge. To that challenge he gave the answer of non-violent non-co-operation, the weapon with which he launched a campaign which brought about an awakening in the people, and a crisis in the lives of many a youth. One of them was a spirited Bihari lad who, like Vinobaji, in his student days, harboured ideas of doing something revolutionary for the deliverance of the motherland from the yoke of the British. As Vinoba had abandoned his university studies he too left Patna College and joined the non-co-operation campaign. At that time few people expected that the struggle would be successful. Indeed, there were many who thought that instead of hastening the day of freedom it might retard it.

The struggle did fizzle out, and disillusioned youth resumed their studies and occupations. The youth of Bihar, however, remained staunch to his boycott of British controlled academic institutions, and worked his way to California to complete his studies. Where was the money to come from? A poor peasant boy, he had not even a hundred-rupee note in his pocket. But, lacking money, he had the intellect to win several scholarships, and to obtain a job as a fruit packer. This enabled him to start his studies at the University of California. Having spent eight years in the United States, working as a farm labourer, a

waiter and a factory hand, and at the same time studying Marxism, he returned to India, where he soon became India's foremost left-wing political leader and the idol of India's youth. A firebrand in politics second only to Nehru in the Congress camp, he was unsurpassed in intellectual brilliance and had a scholar's outlook on life, combined with a strong sense of service.

That Bihari youth of destiny was, as we have noticed before, Jayaprakash Narayan. When he returned to India, he plunged straight into the non-co-operation campaign. When he came out of jail, he formed the Congress Socialist Party. Although remarkable changes have taken place in his political opinions and objectives, owing to changing conditions in a rapidly changing India, he has throughout been a devotee in the service of the Motherland, for the good and glory of the people. The problem of equitable distribution of land was of the utmost importance and interest to Jayaprakash as a Socialist. When he had the opportunity to draw up the economic programme of the Socialist Party, pride of place was given to the problem of land. The election manifesto of the Socialist Party laid great stress on the need for redistribution of the land. An All-India Committee was accordingly formed for this purpose. By that time, however, the Bhoodan movement had already been launched. It was welcomed by the Socialist Party and a resolution commending it was adopted by the party at the instance of Jayaprakash. It was not clear to him then how the Socialists and the Bhoodan workers would co-operate and co-ordinate their efforts. He was certain that the movement sponsored by the Socialist Party would be peaceful in nature. There was, however, a feeling of class antagonism behind the Socialist movement.

Just after the Pachmarhi Conference, Jayaprakash went to Banda to meet Vinobaji and encourage the Bhoodan

workers.* He studied the philosophy and methods of Vinoba's work in the Gaya district. The more he realised the magnitude of the movement and the philosophy behind it, the more he began to feel that the mission of Vinobaji to secure land for the landless, unrelated as it was to party, was more likely to succeed than any land distribution projects mooted by any single political party. Gradually, he became convinced that Vinobaji had evolved a practical although idealistic solution to the problem of land distribution, and that it was the first concrete step towards social revolution by non-violent means. After the death of Mahatma Gandhi the principles of non-violent revolution and the reconstruction of society advocated by him gradually disappeared from sight. After taking over the reins of government Gandhiji's followers strayed from their master's path and began to adopt western bureaucratic methods of administration. They wanted to change and reconstruct society by means of State regulation and by exercising the power vested in them. They seemed to have no clear programme of social reconstruction. They merely wanted to maintain the existing structure of society, with a few changes here and there, as though a tottering house could be prevented from falling by means of stray scaffolding.

Formerly a firm believer in Marxism, Jayaprakash had begun to realise that a socialist society could not be built on the basis of a materialistic philosophy. He was beginning to see that Gandhiji was right when he said that society could not be reconstructed without a corresponding rebuilding of humanity, and that materialism could not serve as the basis for this purpose. He had reached this stage of reasoning before he joined the Bhoodan movement. Later, as he came to be more and more intimately associated with the movement, he realised that it was a

* See p. 59 Chapter IV.

superb endeavour to bring about a revolution in human relationships. There was no such aim or effort in the programme of the socialist movement. He could not, therefore, find satisfaction in any of the socialist patterns or in the stress of socialist thought. One thing was clear to him. The power of the state would increase in a socialist society. How to check this was an important consideration with every thinking socialist. He found a satisfactory answer in the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi and in the revolutionary movement of Vinobaji. Thus, step by step, he came to believe that the true goal and right values of socialism were to be found in the Sarvodaya ideal of society. Sarvodaya could not be established by the power of the State. It could be brought about only by means of a revolution in the realm of thought and in the realisation of the true values of life.

Having come to these conclusions Jayaprakash decided to withdraw from all other activities and devote his entire time and energy to the construction of a Sarvodaya society. It was in this state of mind that he went to Bodh Gaya, and as he stood on the platform of the Sarvodaya Conference, gathering his thoughts for his speech, he spontaneously announced his decision. He did not feel that he was taking some new step or advocating some new policy or line of action. He had been thinking for some time that very few men were actively engaged in the movement, and that fewer still were giving all their time to it with the zeal and devotion worthy of members of the Gandhian family. Unless new workers in sufficient numbers were forthcoming, every one of them influenced by and wedded to its ideals, the movement could not spread rapidly. Continuous conscious effort and sustained action were necessary. At workers' camps and meetings it was customary to take a vow by which one declared the amount of time one was willing to devote to the work.

Some would promise to serve for four years, some for two, some for one, some for one month in a year and some for only one week in the year. Jayaprakash felt that such spasmodic efforts would not help in bringing their great task to a successful conclusion. From personal experience, he knew that any one who really understood the principles underlying the Bhoodan movement and its implications would come to the conclusion that the whole of life must be dedicated to it. Not that those who had decided to give only a part of their time did not add to the strength of the moment; but they lacked the resolution, dedication and fire which were essential for the revolution envisaged. Only those who dedicated their lives to the cause could form the backbone of the army of revolution. At the moment the most beneficial movement for his countrymen, a movement that demanded whole time and attention, all talents, patriotic fervour and powers of organisation, was Bhoodan. Hence his deliberate offer to devote the remaining days of his life to Vinobaji's magnificent mission and to strive for its fulfilment to the satisfaction of its leader.

Vinobaji was deeply touched. "If all of them could work resolutely like Jayaprakash, with as large a heart, as broad a vision and as sagacious a mind," he said, "they would not only ennoble their own lives but would also find new workers to help the movement." Greatly impressed, Acharya J. B. Kripalani was also tempted to offer life-dedication. But, he pointed out at the prayer meeting, much heart-searching and purity were needed before such a bold step could be taken. All personal ambitions, rivalries, ill will and suspicions had to be cast off. The Bhoodan movement, to be truly revolutionary, should, in his opinion, cover all major activities of life. To be successful, it should carry out the whole political, social and economic programme of Gandhiji, who always held that

if spirituality had any meaning it must manifest itself in all fields of human activity, including politics and legislation. Even if politics were a poisonous snake, it must be grappled with, not run away from. Kripalaniji, therefore, held that it was dangerous to neglect the political field. Their efforts should not be limited merely to the collection and equitable distribution of land. Bhoodan leaders would ultimately have to capture political power or see that power was in the hands of those who would use it for bringing about the changes they desired.

The climax came on April 20, the third day of the gathering, when the President, Shrimati Asha Devi, announced that Jayaprakash had sent her two letters—one his own; the other from Baba. She read them out, one after the other. In his letter Jayaprakash said:

"I enclose a letter from Baba. I have no words to comment on the donation of life to small fry like me by a man who has inspired us all. I shall say only this: that I am totally unfit to accept such an invaluable gift. On the contrary, we have to donate our lives in the name of God to Baba himself. Yours in humility, Jayaprakash."

Vinoba's letter ran as follows:

"In response to your call of yesterday, here is the offering of my life for a non-violent revolution based on Bhoodan Yagna and with village industries as its mainstay. Vinoba."

Never before was a Sarvodaya gathering so moved as on this occasion. As the dedicated ones came forward, one after another, the whole atmosphere seemed filled with the

presence of Lord Buddha, the earliest and greatest of all dedicated lives, beckoning them to set their feet on the right path and to help forward a cause both noble and inspired. Shrimati Asha Devi was the first to offer, in gentle tones, her "entire self" to the great cause. "With some diffidence I also offer myself for it," said Dhirendra Majumdar. Diffidence, because dedication did not mean merely accelerating the collection and distribution of land. It meant also discarding old values in every sphere of life. Letter after letter of dedication was then read out by Jayaprakash during the whole morning. No less than 500 persons had offered their lives in dedication. It was a matter for exultation as well as exaltation for the whole audience.

Vinoba asked the workers not to allow themselves to become engrossed in conventional, insipid devotions, but to soar higher. As regards politics, he agreed with what Kripalaniji had said the day before. The political structure had also to be altered. But they must not expect him to hold the reins of administration. That would be the task of others. One of the causes of the change brought about during the past three years was the strength of the people created by Bhoodan Yagna. Increase in the strength of the people would revolutionise the whole administration and help in the establishment of an administration-free society. He called upon Acharya Kripalani to offer his help in that direction, and appealed to all political workers to shed their political differences and join in encouraging and enhancing the strength of the people through the common medium of Bhoodan. That, he believed, would convert "our power-politics into popular politics." The complete dedication of the few would draw out and mobilise the strength of all. Thanks to Jayaprakash, a new key had been placed in their hands

to unlock the power that is inherent in the people who constitute a free society—the silent strength of self-reliance and selfless work.

This, in brief, is the story of dedication of the life of Jayaprakash. What, however, was the true significance and implication of the offer? Not only were Vinoba and Jayaprakash leading dedicated lives, but almost all who had offered their life-gifts at Bodh Gaya, had already been dedicated, some of them concentrating on religious or political progress, others on the social or economic uplift of the people. Why therefore did they offer this fresh dedication? What precisely did it mean? It meant primarily that after having heard the clarion call of Jayaprakash at the Bodh Gaya Conference, summoning all who subscribed to the Sarvodaya doctrine to devote all their resources and energy to the cause of Bhoodan, they had realised clearly the magnitude and urgency of the stupendous work that lay ahead and wished to declare their determination to follow the lead of Vinobaji and Jayaprakash in accelerating the pace of progress towards the goal of all-round revolution in the lives of the people. They had also realised that the work demanded the dedication of their lives to the Bhoodan mission, to the exclusion of all other activities, including politics.

The all-round revolution aimed at by these evangelists of the gospel of Bhoodan was nothing but Gandhiji's idea of a Sarvodaya society, the idea of a mass movement of conversion of individuals and society, making them turn their eyes inwards, and save themselves from being enslaved by their own greed and lower instincts. This conversion included a different outlook on wealth. All wealth is a social product. None can have it without social co-operation. Nor is it possible to accumulate, preserve, use or distribute it, or to derive any benefit from

its possession, without social co-operation. The man of wealth is merely a trustee of what he has, bound to take good care of it and use it not only for the benefit of himself but also for the benefit of society in general. Gandhiji was never weary of preaching this doctrine of trusteeship of wealth, but without the revolution that he hoped to bring about in the hearts and minds of people, his preaching and precepts fell on deaf ears. After independence, his followers acquired power and patronage, and not a few of them became open worshippers of Mammon.

Bhoodan aimed at providing a corrective to the lure of gold through one of its offshoots, the gift of wealth. The way to that non-violent revolution of society for which Gandhiji longed, but which he failed to bring about, was revealed in Bhoodan, thanks to the genius of Vinobaji. For a Gandhian, it was a spiritual pilgrimage towards brotherhood, not merely one of a worker's many constructive activities, but "the very ground of his being." "In the context of Bhoodan," as said by Jayaprakash in elucidation of his dedication, "construction becomes creative; in its absence it remains a dead activity." The spirit of Bhoodan, he goes on to say, is like the flowing river; constructive activities are the boats. Without the moving water the boats are static objects stuck in the mud. It is the river that gives them motion and life. Then only can they carry passengers to their destination.

It is against this background, showing the wide sweep of the movement, its spiritual and ethical approach to the problems of life, that one can understand the offering of one's life to the cause of Bhoodan. To bring about a spiritual revolution, spiritual methods used by the great sages of the world were needed. Great teachers such as Buddha and Christ had indicated the methods. Not long before, in November 1951, Vinoba himself had explained

in one of his speeches what that meant. Ultimately, he stated, it is "*the dedication of one's all for the well-being of all.*"

This is creative living. This is life eternal. With lives so dedicated, life on this earth would surely be radiant and happy. Otherwise it is often colourless and barren. As well as understanding and appreciating a movement such as Vinoba's, the aim of which is to prevent a violent revolution by a non-violent revolution, there must also be sustained effort and immediate and effective action on the part of everyone if human society is to be redeemed. An important requirement for those dedicated men who aspire to better the world wherein they live, and to change the minds and hearts of the people, is that they should first better themselves. Life-dedication is a spiritual pilgrimage. Self-knowledge, self-discipline and self-mastery are the essential requisities for the pilgrim's progress.

Chapter Nine

SAMPATTIDAN: VINOBA'S GOSPEL OF WEALTH

THE PRINCIPLE behind the sacrificial offering of wealth is the same as that behind Bhoodan. Each in its ultimate analysis is nothing but the ancient doctrine of stewardship of wealth in action. It does not merely mean sharing one's possessions with other members of the human family. There is a great spiritual significance behind the sacrificial offerings. Vinobaji is concerned not so much with the offering of land or money as with man and his conversion as a condition preceding the rebuilding of society. Gift does not simply mean bounty. In the scriptural sense of the term it signifies an equitable distribution of property. By offering a gift the donor benefits himself. It means purification of his heart and also peace of mind. It is not charity and can only be accepted as a token of love and a manifestation of acceptance and appreciation of the doctrine that whatever comes to us we hold for God's use for the service of mankind. The change of heart implicit in the sharing of possessions with others means purification not only of the giver and the receiver but also of people in general. Bhoodan, therefore, requires, as does the sacrifice of wealth, that having bestowed land or money, the giver must not bid good-bye to the receiver and forget the high aim and purpose behind the sacramental offering. Bearing in mind the ultimate aim, the conversion of both the giver and the receiver, he must

regard himself as a means of bringing about the necessary change in human relationships. He must realise how his acquisitiveness and his greed in obtaining and clinging to land and other property ruin others. Were he to give up his greed and free himself from the desire to cling to land and property as his God-given right, the change implicit in the Bhoodan sacrifice would take place, and this penitentiary in which man makes himself and others miserable would be transformed into the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of justice and compassion.

This idea underlying Bhoodan and sacrifice of wealth conforms in almost all details with the doctrine of trusteeship of wealth preached and expounded by Gandhiji, and with his idea of a revolutionary change in the order of society. If progress in India is to take place along peaceful lines, there must be "a definite recognition on the part of the moneyed class that the peasant also possesses a soul, and that their wealth gives them no superiority over the poor." They should regard themselves, Gandhi urged, like the Japanese nobles, as trustees holding their wealth for the good of their ward, the peasant. A model landowner should, in his opinion, reduce much of the burden carried by the cultivators on their feeble shoulders, and give them hope instead of despair. That was the first step towards the change of heart he looked for. How the burden could be lightened is explained in his own words:

> "The model landowner will not be satisfied with the peasant's ignorance of the laws of sanitation and hygiene. He will reduce himself to poverty in order that the peasant may have the necessaries of life. He will study the economic condition of the peasants placed by Providence under his care, establish schools in which he will educate his own children side by side with those of the agricultural workers. He will purify the village well

and the village tank. He will teach the peasant to sweep his roads and clean his latrines, himself undertaking this necessary labour. He will throw open without reserve his own gardens for the unrestricted use of the peasant. He will utilise most of his land and buildings not necessary for him for the promotion of education, medical relief, recreation and other welfare work."*

If only men of wealth could read the signs of the time and revise their ideas of ownership; if the gross inequality of income and opportunity between the rich and the poor could be minimised; if both could gain strength by conversion, could not society in India be transformed within a short time into a peaceful, contented and happy co-operative and creative family? Failing voluntary surrender of superfluities, there was nothing, in the opinion of Gandhiji, to stand between the rich and the impending chaos into which the awakened ignorant and hungry millions would plunge the country.

In the unjust distribution of wealth lies one of the primary causes of extreme inequality of opportunity. Everywhere, therefore, political parties of all shades of thought are agreed that the first step for the reform of the existing social order is to redistribute income. Gandhiji went a step further. Economic equality, he held, was the master key to non-violent independence. Working for economic equality meant abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour, " the levelling down of the few rich in whose hand is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth, on the one hand, and the levelling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other." So long as the gulf between the rich and the hungry millions remained as wide as ever, a non-violent system of government was clearly an impossibility. The contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor labouring class

* *Young India*, 5.12. 1929.

nearby could not last one day in a free India. "A violent and bloody revolution," he declared, "is a certainty one day unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and of the power given by riches, and a sharing of them for a common good. I adhere to my doctrine of trusteeship in spite of the ridicule that has been poured upon it. It is true that it is difficult to reach."

The real meaning of equal distribution was that each man should have the wherewithal to supply all his needs and no more. The needs of different people may, however, vary. The apostle of "The uplift of all" did not fail to take these differences into consideration. If one man had a weak digestion and required only a quarter of a pound of flour for his bread and another needed a pound, then both should be able to satisfy their wants. The entire social order has to be rebuilt. It might not be achieved at once but the aim should always be kept in mind.

The first step towards the goal was to bring about the necessary changes in a person's own life. He should reduce his wants to a minimum, remembering the poverty of India. His earnings should not be tainted by corrupt practices. His house should be in keeping with his new mode of life. Self-restraint should be exercised in every sphere of life. "When he has done all that is possible in his own life," said Bapu, "then only will he be in a position to preach this ideal among his associates and neighbours. At the root of the doctrine of equal distribution lies the idea of trusteeship by the wealthy for their superfluous wealth. According to the doctrine they may not possess a rupee more than their neighbours."

Was it practical? Gandhiji did not pause to raise or answer that question. How was it to be brought about? Should the wealthy be dispossessed of their property? That could only be done by resorting to violence. Gandhiji thought that no such violent action could benefit

society. On the contrary, society would be the poorer for it as it would "lose the gifts of a man who knows how to accumulate wealth." The conclusion, therefore, was that the rich man should be left in possession of his wealth, and that he should use only what he reasonably required for his personal needs; he should act as a trustee of the remainder on behalf of the people. "If, however," Gandhiji asked himself, "in spite of the utmost effort the rich do not become guardians of the poor in the true sense of the term and the latter become more and more crushed and die of hunger, what is to be done?" In trying to solve this riddle, he said, "I have decided upon non-violent non-co-operation and civil disobedience as the right and infallible means. The rich cannot accumulate wealth without the co-operation of the poor. If this knowledge were to penetrate to and spread among the poor, they would become strong and would learn how to free themselves by means of non-violence from the crushing inequalities which have brought them to the verge of starvation."

Instead of inaugurating his sacrificial giving with land, Vinoba could just as well have begun with wealth, having the same end in view. Why then did he wait for two years before putting forward his demand for the gift of wealth? The reason is not far to seek. Land is the source of production for the satisfaction of the primary needs of the people. It is also the main source of employment. It has, however, been most unevenly distributed under an unjust economic system, causing distress, discontent and unrest in most countries. In a predominantly rural country like India, the land problem is more acute and more fundamental than elsewhere. Vinobaji, therefore, embarked first on his Bhoodan mission and waited for the opportune moment to ask for money and other gifts. When the Bhoodan movement was in full swing in Bihar, and when it seemed that his gospel had penetrated into the hearts of

the people, Vinobaji launched the programme for sacrificial money gifts. It had a few novel features. It was a voluntary commitment for life. A person would set apart a portion of his wealth or income, one-sixth as a rule, but more or less according to his means. But instead of collecting the amount given, Vinoba allowed the giver to keep it. Thus Vinoba hoped that the giver and his family would live at their best creative level and help to bring about the desired change in society.

This conception gave a handle to hostile critics to deride Vinobaji's efforts as quaint and sterile. Vinoba wants neither land nor money, they said. He is satisfied if he gets merely a piece of paper (meaning gift deeds). Here is a deity demanding the offering of paper instead of flowers. Just as one garlands a godling, so may one put round this deity's neck garlands of gift deeds without spending a penny! Those critics did not realise that what was said in jest was in reality a fact. Vinoba valued the pledge of the giver more than the land or money offered to him. "I value the property as much as I do this piece of paper which records the gift," he said. "We will have it written on this paper by the giver 'so long as I am alive I shall give a specific portion of my income as charity. I will set aside a share even if it should mean that only half of my own needs are satisfied.'"

The procedure adopted was to tell the givers how they were to set aside and use the amount donated. "We believe," said Vinoba, "that the idea will be generally accepted; that when an additional member comes into the family it is part of our duty to support him. When this idea gains currency, some five or ten people will join together and contribute shares and help a deserving person wherever he is found." . . . "The beneficiary will not have to bend low; he will neither indulge in wasteful expenditure nor take more than what he urgently

requires. Both he who gives and he who takes will be blessed."

Under such a scheme none need ask for alms. Almsgiving would be absolutely ruled out. Sacrifice of wealth would take its place. Confident of a favourable response, Vinobaji appealed to all, young and old, to take part in this sacrifice. "He who takes food should give away a portion of it. Out of that portion," he pointed out, "many valued servants of the human race in various walks of life, including poets and scientists, who needed help could be conveniently and honourably maintained."

The demand to share part of one's wealth with the needy has come down through the ages. The principle of leaving it to the giver to enter into an agreement with his conscience and fix the amount according to his means has also precedents in the history of philanthropy, but the idea of allowing the giver to keep the money and to distribute it himself in a way agreed upon with the initiator of the wealth sacrifice is undoubtedly Vinobaji's. How it will work in practice, considering the weakness of human nature, remains to be seen. Mere redistribution of wealth will not solve the problem of mass poverty. The gifts of land and money together, however, could do so, provided that a change of heart and the co-ordination of effort of both rich and poor are secured.

To understand how the doctrine of stewardship of wealth has come down to us through the ages, let us recall what was attempted in the past by those who preached the gospel of wealth, moved by the same considerations as those that impelled Vinoba to launch his call to sacrifice let us also see how the ground was prepared at each stage for the doctrine now preached by Vinobaji, and how closely the schemes resembled and anticipated the project embodied in land and wealth sacrifice. Religious thought appears to have been

considerably influenced from the earliest times by the unequal distribution of wealth among different classes of people. The inequality between classes and the consequent pressure of social wrong and the denial of social justice, resulting in the lowering of the level of society, were man's own creation. His selfishness and greed, his love of money and mania for hoarding destroyed the spiritual basis for the ideal society visualised by the seers. The real treasures of life were spiritual; love of God, fellowship, communion and co-operation with Him, joy of an ordered and disciplined life. It therefore became the concern of every religious teacher to root out from the heart of man the love of gold and of material prosperity, to eradicate all the evil inclinations arising from it, and to urge man to use his worldly for the betterment of mankind.

The idea of stewardship of wealth was implicit in this teaching. "Freely ye have received, freely give," was the keynote. Christianity elaborated the doctrine. "We are debtors to society from the day of our birth. Whatever comes to us we hold for God's use, for the service of human need. Property has no rights that are not relative to this." This had been the tradition of the Christian Church from the days of the Apostles. All property is held in trust. Owners of property have to account for its use to God. "Much that we are accustomed to hear called legitimate insistence upon the rights of property," says Bishop Gore, "the Old Testament would seem to call the robbery of God and grinding the faces of the poor." Dedication of the tenth of whatever one had to God was, like the Sabbath, a very old rule running through the Bible and endorsed by Christ. To ignore it was to rob God. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. . . . Bring ye all the tithes into the store house."

After Christ we find Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam,

fully realising the need for the equitable distribution of wealth and the dedication of it to God. A special feature of Islam is *Zakat,* corresponding to tithe. Literally, *Zakat* means purification of one's self, but in its wider sense it specifically signified a portion of one's property given in charity, as a means of sanctification. This is a religious duty, incumbent upon every Muslim who is free, sane and adult.

Thus we see the gospel of wealth coming to us amplified from time to time, but always with the emphasis on the doctrine that we are stewards of all we possess. The most notable example of a church dignitary's concept of the stewardship of wealth is that of John Wesley. He was perhaps the most gifted preacher and writer the world has ever known. At the age of eighty-three, he was piqued to discover that he could not write more than fifteen hours a day without hurting his eyes. At the age of eighty-six he was ashamed to admit that he could not preach more than twice a day with as much ease as formerly.* The proceeds of his writings amounted to thousands of pounds, which he gave away in accordance with his own simplified gospel of wealth. "Gain all you can, by honest industry, diligence, and all the understanding which God has given you. Save all you can, and if you have any surplus, do good to all men." Long before his death he declared: "If I leave behind me ten pounds above my debt and my books, or what may happen to be due on account of them, you and all mankind bear witness against me that I lived a thief and a robber."

Ruskin and other writers of his time, such as Tolstoy and Carlyle, were profoundly influenced by the traditional Christian teaching of Wesley and other divines. Bishop Gore also appears to have taken from the same source his analogy of robbery of God, in reference to what was

* Arnold Lunne: *Living Creatively,* p.54.

commonly considered to be legitimate insistence upon the rights of property. Coming to our times we see Gandhiji influenced deeply by the teaching of Ruskin's *Unto This Last,* which became his bible, and his philosophy of "the raising up of all" is admittedly based on the deep impression created on him by Ruskin's book.

Gandhiji's autobiography shows how his life was changed after reading that little book. During his student days he had read practically nothing besides textbooks. Later on, the active life he led left little time for reading. Of the very few books he did read, *Unto This Last* brought about, in his own words, "an instantaneous and practical transformation" in his life. "I believe," he says, "that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin, and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life. The teachings of *Unto This Last* I understood to be: (i) that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all; (ii) that a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work; (iii) that a life of labour—the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman—is the life worth living. The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realised. The third had never occurred to me. *Unto This Last* made it as clear as daylight for me that the second and the third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice."*

What should be the proper rendering of the phrase "Unto This Last"? Gandhiji's scholarly disciple says the correct rendering should be "raising up of the last" rather than "the raising up of all (Sarvodaya)" "But," observes Vinoba, "in laying the emphasis on the 'last' it is intended that the task of minimising, if not abolishing, inequalities

* *Autobiography*, Pt. IV, Ch. XVIII

should proceed from that end." The untouchable "sweeper" should be the first concern of those who work for the raising up of all. The word *Sarvodaya,* coined by the Master, should remain, and the emphasis on the "last" should also be borne in mind. It is not that all others have been lifted and only those at the end of the chain remained. In this unfortunate world of ours, says Vinoba, we are all fallen, and everyone needs uplifting. "The rich have fallen long since and the poor have not risen at all. The result is that both need to be uplifted." In one of his hymns Tulsidas sings:

Lord, Thou alone knowest the right method of Grace.
Thou takest away the smallness of the small and
the greatness of the great.

A few years before Gandhiji preached his gospel, another admirer of the doctrine of Wesley and Ruskin, Andrew Carnegie, had come forward with his interpretation of the principle of stewardship of wealth. The discussion of his articles on wealth in England and America brought to light the aim and object of a Systematic Beneficence Society established in 1860 in England to promote the principle and practice of setting apart the first day of the week for God and Man, and a stated proportion of one's income, ordinarily not less than one-tenth. The Grand Old Man of England, William Gladstone, gave the discussion on wealth a practical turn by recalling what might be called the "sacrifice of wealth" project of the British and Foreign Systematic Beneficence Society. The Society ceased to exist at the time of the discussion but the moment was opportune to recall its existence and its ideal. It is interesting to note to-day the points of resemblance and divergence between the project of that nineteenth-century brotherhood of givers and the

wealth sacrifice launched by Vinobaji, the twentieth-century apostle of the doctrine of voluntary distribution of wealth.

According to both projects, everyone is expected to open an account with his or her conscience. According to both schemes the amount to be dedicated to God and the needy is to be fixed as one's own conscience dictates. The minimum suggested in each case varies. Vinoba's sacrifice of wealth favours one-sixth; the Society's minimum was one-tenth. The arrangement entered into by the giver in either case has no legal force to enforce it except to borrow Gladstone's phraseology, "the action of the private conscience in the internal forum." The most interesting point of resemblance is, however, the idea of maintaining the dignity of the recipient and bringing him and the giver together in mutual co-operation and goodwill, softening, if not altogether eliminating, the asperities between the different classes.

In two important respects, however, Vinoba's plan differs from the Beneficence Society scheme. The amount fixed for the sacrificial gift of wealth is given for life, whereas the engagement of the giver with the Society was to give the fixed share of his income from week to week, without any obligation to continue it for life. Again, while the weekly contributions went straight to the Society's pool, the amount earmarked for Sampattidan is to remain, according to present arrangements, with the giver to be disbursed by him in consultation with or according to the directions of Vinobaji, the idea underlying the arrangement being the conversion of both the giver and the receiver, the act of giving, like the quality of mercy, blessing him that gives and him that takes.

During the closing days of the nineteenth century there was need to revive the project of the Beneficence Society. How very keen Gladstone was to be identified with such a

movement is worth recalling to-day when the need is still as pressing as ever before throughout the world. Despite his political preoccupations, the great statesman of his age was eager to offer his best endeavour to see a new organisation launched for the purpose. "The work of correspondence necessary to organise the plan," he said, "and set it going, would be altogether beyond my power to undertake. At the same time, I am ready to be the careful recipient of any assents to the general conception which there may be a disposition to tender and (without any other pledge) I should hold myself bound to make such endeavour towards a practical beginning as would at least prevent good intentions thus conveyed from falling to the ground." Would that a Vinoba had been there to launch the scheme of Sampattidan and cheer the Grand Old Man of England!

Chapter Ten

DISTRIBUTION—THE ACID TEST

THE RECLUSE who left his *ashram* for Telengana on a peace mission in 1951 became within a few months the largest landowner and distributor of land. The acid test of his Bhoodan mission was the distribution and its effect on the material and moral condition of the recipients of the gifts. But returns required in order to assess the results were lacking. The sort of administrative machinery, the method, the system, the blue prints, the regulations, statements and statistics expected from governmental organisations and business concerns could hardly be demanded from devotees of God. Bhoodan was not a premeditated, pre-planned programme. The idea of launching it came to Vinoba as a plan from God. Divinely inspired and led by a saint in whose philosophy worldly thoughts, worldly maxims and standards have no place, it disarmed criticism from a purely rational and practical point of view. But, God-inspired and spontaneous though the sacrificial task was when it was started, it has during the last five years assumed a practical form and has evolved its own methods of work and machinery of administration in which the idealism of a saint is exquisitely blended with the realism of a man of action.

Even a friendly critic would therefore be justified in demanding answers to various questions that arise. Why is land distributed in the ratio of five to forty-three? Have the initial difficulties in undertaking the distribution been overcome? Do those who receive gifts of land possess the knowledge and the means to cultivate the land?

If not, is there any arrangement whereby the necessary training, tools and resources for cultivation are provided? Does the distribution lead to the consolidation of small holdings and therefore to increased production, or does it lead to further fragmentation of land, resulting in a lower yield? What precautions are taken to ensure the right of the receivers to the land given? The movement does not stop at distribution. It envisages the conversion of hearts and the transformation of society. Has this object been even partially attained? Have land gifts produced purity of mind and heart, feelings of brotherhood and benevolence? Is there any arrangement to sustain the enthusiasm of villagers in the sacrifice and to train and encourage them to make the best use of their labour and intelligence? Are they shaking off their sloth and the superstition of centuries? Is the change of heart taking place in them too?

It seemed best to get information and clarification from Vinobaji before attempting answers to these questions. It was, therefore, arranged that the author should call on Vinobaji at Jagennathpuri. An hour after he had settled down in the room reserved for him in the splendidly situated Railway Hotel facing the sea (March 21, 1955), Vinobaji's secretary, Damodarbhai, courtesy personified, called to say that Vinobaji would see him immediately after the prayer meeting. By 4 p.m. large numbers of people had gathered at the prayer ground. The writer was lucky to find a little space in the last row of the audience. On the raised platform sat the saint, revered by the villagers, with his head bent in devotion, a picture of piety and simplicity. The entire theme of his speech that afternoon was temple entry. Vinobaji's feelings had once more been grievously hurt by the attitude of the bigoted head of the Puri temple. His condemnation of such an attitude, altogether repugnant to the spirit of religion,

recalled his former denunciation at Deoghar. On that occasion the right of his untouchable companions to enter the temple had been disputed; now it was a French lady who was denied admission. As she was a foreigner, the question had assumed international significance, and outraged the sentiments of all interested in the promotion of world brotherhood and fellowship of faiths.

After the meeting, Vinobaji took the author to his room. By this time, however, the latter had made up his mind not to bother Vinobaji with questions concerning the distribution of land. Workers who were dealing with the distribution were present in Puri and could provide the necessary information. After a preliminary exchange of courtesies, Vinoba was told that all the questions regarding distribution were reserved for his associates. It seemed that the decision made no difference to him. He was concerned only with fundamentals. Details would take care of themselves. Difficulties and setbacks, even the chances of success or failure, did not ruffle his equanimity. The writer might have anticipated his replies. With similar serenity he treated the question of legislation to help the movement. Whatever Government might decide to do or not to do, he was content to carry on in his own way, legislation or no legislation. During the interview he seemed concerned about the low population figures of the Parsis, and about their religion and customs. After half an hour's interesting and very friendly talk the author took leave of the saint. Thereafter he was invited daily to the sessions of the Sarvodaya Fellowship and to various committee meetings, in order that he might enter into the atmosphere as much as possible.

The data regarding Bhoodan were not complete. Several gaps had to be filled. But the available facts were sufficient to give a fairly accurate idea of the systematic and businesslike lines on which the work was carried on.

Bhoodan workers first ascertain who are the landless in the village where it is proposed to distribute land. "Just as a man who wants to marry his daughter seeks a suitable bridegroom," says Vinoba in one of his speeches, "similarly, we search for people who deserve land gifts. After we solemnise the marriage of a daughter, we give her jewellery and other gifts; similarly, we arrange to supply all other needs of the tiller, such as a pair of bullocks, seeds and other requirements." On the appointed day, the members of the fellowship visit the village where land is to be offered to the landless. They ask the people to name those whom they consider to be the most needy, deserving and suitable. After they have indicated their choice, preference is given to Untouchables or those who belong to other backward communities. Only those who are not engaged in any other calling, and who are fit to be cultivators, get plots of land sufficient for their requirements. The workers are accompanied by officials of the Revenue Department, who assist in the work of registration and in the completion of legal formalities.

Land distribution work was first started in Hyderabad. The rules framed by the Hyderabad Government provided that on receipt of the document donating land, the tax-collector should ascertain whether any amounts were due to Government, whether arrears of land revenue or otherwise. On completion of the inquiry the document was accepted. Vinobaji's Selection Committee then chose the persons who were to receive land. The grant was subject to the condition that in the event of a co-operative society being formed in the village the recipient of the land would join it. He also undertook not to sell the land for ten years. Land granted as a cultivable waste was free from revenue assessment during the first three years, provided that it was cultivated within two years of possession. No stamp fee or registration charge was to be levied in

respect of these transactions. It was decided that each family should be allotted an acre of wet land, or one acre of dry land, for each member of the family, subject to a maximum of six acres. Allotments were made on the same lines and on a similar scale in Madhya Pradesh, but in the case of Vindhya Pradesh and other states the size of the holding allocated varied according to the fertility of the soil and other considerations.

The Uttar Pradesh code is an elaboration of the regulations obtaining in other provinces. During the seven days preceding the distribution, the workers inspect the land that has been given, study its fertility and decide the acreage necessary for the maintenance of a peasant family. They also request the head of the local village Council and the police official to help them in the inspection and appraisal of the fertility of the land. Information regarding the date and place of distribution is given to the District Magistrate and other officials concerned. The representatives of the District Magistrate and the police official are present at the meeting and give the organisers the benefit of their advice and assistance.

At the distribution, the entire population of the village and the givers are present. Then one of the Bhoodan workers makes a short speech explaining the ideology of Bhoodan, the method of distribution and the policy underlying it. The landless are then asked to stand up. As they are all local people, who know one another, and as the officials are present, there is no chance for a landholder to pass himself off as landless. Preference is given to agricultural labourers who have no means of earning their livelihood except as workers on the land of others. Next come poor cultivators who have insufficient land and no other means of occupation. What remains is allotted to those who have taken to other occupations, but would like to revert to cultivation. If sufficient land is not available,

even for the first group, the landless themselves are asked to select the most deserving from among themselves. The choice is invariably unanimous. In rare cases lots are drawn. The Bhoodan workers act merely as witnesses.

The receivers are given certificates of allotment, signed by the police official and the chairman of the village panchayat. They do not pay any fee. It is a condition of the grant that the land received should be cultivated by the recipient himself for a period of at least 10 years, and that cultivation should start within 3 years from the date on which he received it. Failing that, it might be taken back from him.

Satisfactory as the rules for distribution are, from a movement with the responsibility of administering an ever-expanding estate, held in trust for the welfare of the community, the public have the right to expect periodic statements and statistics of land received and its distribution. Such returns have accordingly been furnished from time to time, and they reflect the progress made. To gain a clear idea of the revolution that it is hoped to bring about on all fronts, one has, however, to turn to the minds and hearts that are purified and illumined day after day by the flames of the sacrificial fire lit by Vinoba. Naturally, Vinoba himself is interested not so much in the administrative details, regulations and returns, not so much even in the area of land already received and still to be received by the end of 1957, as in the influence exercised by Bhoodan in transforming the life of the people.

To live uprightly one must first have the means to live. All the world believes this. There must, therefore, be some statistics regarding the land that has changed hands during the past, and the collection of money, wells, bullocks, seeds and other necessities to help the new class of proprietors to make the best use of their land. From April 18th, 1951, to May 31st, 1956, 4,182,431 acres

of land were received from 537,479 donors. During this period 493,567 acres of land were distributed among 149,043 families. The collection of money gifts amounted to the modest figure of Rs. 781,522 from 27,808 donors. But many gifts were made in kind, such as bullocks, implements, seeds, etc. It has not been possible to give the value of these with any degree of accuracy. Of the voluntary labour given to speed the new proprietors on their way there can be no estimate. But there is ample evidence to show that such voluntary service has been given in abundance. It would appear that the villages have so far contributed much more to the sacrifice than the cities. Compared with the land and labour donated in villages and the number of donors, the amount received from cities is insignificant.

The figures of land obtained, though not very impressive, amply vindicate Vinoba's faith in the inherent goodness of man and the efficacy of moral force in transforming unjust systems. All this land has been obtained by a gentle appeal to the good sense and goodness of the owners of land. Just as the weapon of the non-co-operation movement was moral as opposed to physical force, and was a powerful means of putting aggressors to shame and making them feel that they were unjust when dealing with opponents, so does the gentle appeal of Bhoodan create in owners of large pieces of land a sense of shame, because they own more than they need, while thousands of landless starve. Vinoba at one time thought that if persuasion failed he might have to resort to the weapon of non-co-operation, but it is to be hoped that the necessity will never arise.

It has been alleged that nearly half the land offered in Bhoodan is uncultivable. But the available figures show that only a very small percentage of the land donated was not fit for cultivation, and that a large portion of even

such land has been rendered arable, thanks to wells having been dug and the means of cultivation provided. The critics say that the bulk of the land has come from poverty-stricken agriculturists, and that its distribution might mean robbing Peter to pay Paul. Authentic statistics are not available, but the criticism is unfounded as some of the big land holders have given a hundred thousand acres or more, and the land received from small landholders forms a very small part of the total area distributed. Moreover, the transfer of small areas received from owners of very small holdings to others possessing small holdings have in many cases converted uneconomic holdings into economic holdings. That means beneficial distribution, and an increase in production. In the case of whole villages being donated, although the plots of land given by individual donors may not be large, the consolidation of holdings and co-operative tilling of such villages would yield the best results. The number of whole villages given in Bhoodan was 1109 on May 31, 1956.*

A remarkable illustration of a total gift is that of a compact piece of land measuring 460 acres, comprising three villages, Uberni, Ghuri and Thularaj in Raebareti district. The land has been laid out, on lines approved by Vinobaji, in different sections, housing for 40 families, cultivation, gardening, forests, and pastures. The principles underlying the scheme constitute the basis of the village autonomy as visualised by the workers. In addition to the members of the forty families, any one domiciled for the minimum period of three years could become a mem-

* Since this date, Bhoodan workers have concentrated on encouraging villagers to pool all their land and to keep it pooled for a bold experiment in co-operation and village autonomy. These simple folk are not slow to realise that only when the village is run as a co-operative enterprise with everyone having an equal stake in its development can the idea of village autonomy be realised. The entire villages received at the end of April 1957 numbered over 2500.

ber of this simple little republic named Vinoba Puri. Water supply was the paramount need. A scheme for digging 16 wells was therefore drawn up and was given top priority. Basic education schools, Montessori classes, a school of spinning and weaving and a dispensary were also set up. Financial assistance was secured through gifts of money and endowments from the Gandhi Memorial Fund and Patel Samarak Nidhi. The best feature was the local contribution of Rs. 17,475, more than 60 per cent of the total collection.

Trees were planted on an extensive scale. Cultivation of millets, bajra, and other cereals was proceeding satisfactorily. Bullocks were provided for those in need. Cottage industries received special attention. Hand-pounding of rice, grinding of cereals and hand-weaving also contributed towards the achievement of self-sufficiency in food and cloth. A night school for adults and facilities for homœopathic treatment were some of the interesting features of the scheme.

It must not be forgotten, however, that the fundamental objective of the Sacrifice is purification of the hearts of both the rich and the poor. Increase in production and changes in economic conditions are, after all, secondary objectives. The initial land gifts mark merely the first phase of the movement. Development of the corporate life of the people and of the village as "an organised commonwealth complete within itself," to quote the words of Mountstuart Elphinstone, giving a picture of the ancient village communities, is the primary aim. The initial gifts help to level up earnings. Later, says Vinoba, the community will convert itself into a family unit. "Later on, owning property jointly as a family unit would have to be planned on a nation-wide scale." Dipping a little deeper into the future, it might be that some disciple of Vinoba, or Vinoba himself, would come forward to

advocate the total realisation of the Uplift for All ideal for the entire world community—the Family of God—planned by nations, in fellowship.

It was feared during the initial stage of the movement that the titles to much of the land offered would be found defective, and that this would lead to disputes and litigation; but only in rare cases were titles not clear, and the few cases in which the giver had no right to gift away the land have been amicably settled. In no case has the gift of land been revoked.

The main criticism, however, the justification for which is admitted even by the sponsors of the movement, is that only about 8% of the land available has been distributed since the date on which the first land gift was obtained. Who are in possession of the remaining 92% of the land, who cultivates it, when will it be distributed? These questions demand satisfactory explanations. "Hasten slowly" appears so far to have been the guiding principle of distribution. Various initial difficulties had to be met, rules governing distribution had to be framed, broad principles concerning selection of applicants for land had to be enunciated, conditions under which recipients were to take over the land and cultivate it had to be prescribed, efficient personnel for the work of distribution and supervision had to be secured, and bullocks, tools, seed and other needs had to be provided. Making due allowance for all these factors, it would still appear that the snail-like pace of distribution indicates a serious flaw in the organisation. Now that the initial difficulties have been overcome, and constructive workers are coming forward to strengthen the executive personnel, some of the states have passed legislation for facilitating transfer, while others are contemplating measures such as undertaking the distribution of Bhoodan lands; rapid and substantial distribution of the remaining land may be expected. It

may also be hoped that, day after day, more and more land will be brought under cultivation and production increased. What about the setback in procuring land? There was a good start and fair progress for a time. After that the movement appears to have lost its momentum. Scarcity of capable workers and trained men for organisational and administrative work is obviously the reason. Vinoba has taken upon himself the burden of a vast subcontinent, that of rural India. Is he a Hercules? Even a Hercules needs the joint effort of many shoulders to lift the burden.

Available data shows that a large number of recipients of Bhoodan land were agricultural labourers who possessed the knowledge and aptitude to make good use of the land. Almost all, however, lacked the means for cultivation. Hundreds of new wells had, therefore, to be dug and bullocks and seeds had to be supplied. Voluntary labour has also played its part in the provision of wells and other facilities. Agriculture by itself does not pay. Spinning-wheels have, therefore, been provided to stimulate spinning, and Bhoodan workers have settled down in villages in order to help, instruct and guide new as well as old landowners in the improvement of their economic conditions, and also to infuse into them the spirit of Sarvodaya. It has been pointed out that for this kind of revolution in the minds of the people, leaders from all ranks, especially from the masses, should come forward to further the movement throughout the country. Leaders such as Shri Shankarrao Deo, Dada Dharmadhikari, Jayaprakash Narayan, Nabakrushna Chaudhari, Suresh Ramabhai, Dhirendranath Mazumdar, Vallabhswami, Ravi Shanker Maharaj and A. K. Karanbhai have dedicated their lives to this cause. But they come from the rank of the élite. It would be interesting to know how many capable leaders have sprung from the masses. For a mass movement

aiming at the total revolution of society, it is not enough that, inspired for a while by Vinobaji, or stirred by popular and trusted leaders like Jayaprakash during their visits, villagers should sing hallelujahs, offer land at the altar of Bhoodan, pulsate with new life, but lapse into inaction after their leaders' backs are turned. It is vital that the spirit of Bhoodan should animate villages and cities and influence the daily routine, conduct, thought, views and way of life of the people, and knit their inhabitants together in bonds of fellow-feeling and brotherly love. Thousands of dedicated lives are required for the immense task that lies ahead.

Although the movement suffers from a lack of workers and of the means for economic improvement amongst a large section of the rural population, a good deal of work on the spiritual side has been successfully accomplished. The moral and spiritual gain, even during the short period of five years, is impressive. Thousands of children as well as adults have been taught to read and write, given simple lessons in sanitation and hygiene and weaned from superstitious and harmful practices. Women in rural India are coming into their own. They rush to prayer meetings and imbibe something of the new social philosophy of life. Even purdah women, who had never come out of their homes before, are seen among the audience, listening with rapt attention to the wonderful words of the saint.

Such a country-wide movement cannot fail to impress the authorities both in Delhi and in the States, and to influence their policy. It has underlined the need to give first priority to the problem of land in the development plans of the Government; it has stimulated action to transform the agrarian system and reorganise it so as to ensure that the tillers enjoy the fruit of their labour. The intermediaries between the States and the cultivators—landowners and many others—have been practically elimi-

nated. All the States have now accepted the principle of the total abolition of this unjust system. Legislation for the elimination of intermediaries has been passed and has been implemented in most of the States—fully in Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Hyderabad, Pepsu, Bhopal—substantially in Andhra, Bombay, Madras, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Bharat and Saurashtra—and partially in Bihar, Orissa, Rajasthan and Vindhya Pradesh.

Legislation for the reduction of rent has also been enacted in several states. Measures to check fragmentation of holdings and the transfer of those holdings which are below specified limits have been taken or are under contemplation. A positive remedy for the ills of fragmentation of land is consolidation. It has been tried in many states. The development of co-operative farming is one of the essential features of the land policy enunciated in the First Five Year Plan. The policy followed by the sponsors of Bhoodan under Vinoba's instructions is also co-operative although the technique may not be the same. While not much progress has been made in this direction under the Five Year Plan, Bhoodan workers are forging ahead on the lines of co-operative farming in villages made over to Vinoba as total gifts. Interesting experiments are tried under the guidance of constructive workers, and villages given entirely to Bhoodan will soon blossom forth as simple little republics.

To meet the need of a common approach in the agrarian reforms programmes the Union Government has appointed a Central Committee for land reform. Since its inception in May 1954 it has offered advice and assistance at various stages to several states in drawing up and carrying out their programmes. With the co-operation of official organisations and Bhoodan workers the villages are now well on the way to the introduction of far-reaching reforms. Whatever has been achieved in this direction has certainly

given new life to millions, and has opened the door of hope for many more. The time has now arrived for closer co-operation between the authorities and the Bhoodan workers, and for the co-ordination of their efforts.

No one can foresee what new peaks of universal benevolence and spiritual progress will be reached in the course of this unique revolution. But whatever happens in the future, notable progress has undoubtedly been made since 1951 towards the establishment of a new society. The first great victory in the crusade against the appalling poverty and helplessness of the rural population was the conversion of landlords. They cheerfully accepted the doctrine that wealth and property must be shared with their fellows, that it was a matter of shame, if not a sin, to be owners of large estates when millions were famishing for want of land and other means of subsistence. Illustrations of such changes of heart given in the preceding pages show how quickly man can be made to accept a new gospel of goodness in a selfish, sordid but rapidly changing world. Here is another illustration.

A girl knocks at the door of a landlord reputed to be a man of doubtful character, hard-headed and close-fisted.

"Who is there?" asked a voice from within.

"Your sister," replied Vimlabehen Thakkar, one of the workers for Bhoodan.

"I have a bad name in this neighbourhood. You had better not approach me."

"What of that? I come to see my brother."

She told him who she was—a Bhoodan worker on a begging mission for land for the landless. He readily agreed to give some land.

"And now," she said smilingly, "I would like you to walk with me round the village and help me to secure more gifts."

"I am afraid I shall be a liability to you, not an asset."

"I don't think so. Please come along with me."

"Very well. My services are at your disposal."

Evidence is also accumulating daily to show how readily recipients of Bhoodan, Bhoomiputras (sons of land, as they are called) also change. At one of the villages in Bihar, Sekhawara, immediately after the distribution of land among 73 families, the recipients expressed the wish that facilities might be given to them for the education of the juvenile as well as the adult population of the village. "We requested," says Vinobaji's secretary, Damodardas, "Shri Hastimal Sadhak, one of our workers, a zealous Jain mendicant, to undertake the mission." While cheerfully accepting the work entrusted to him, he found that there was a great obstacle in his way. How to improve minds depraved by drink? Prohibition or no prohibition, the scourge of the drink habit continues to claim its victims, in cities and villages alike. Sadhakji mentioned this difficulty frankly to them. The villagers were deeply impressed. For the first time, perhaps, they felt ashamed of their weakness for liquor. They decided there and then to give up the drink habit, and begged Sadhakji to live with them and enrich their lives. Greatly pleased, Sadhakji made the village his headquarters. Within two months, says Damodardas, "every child and adult learned to read and write his or her name." All the land, about a hundred acres, was brought under cultivation. It was fallow before, but with additional bullocks and a well dug by their own labour and a rain-water tank constructed by them, they converted it into a delightful farm.

Owners of land who, during the visit of the Bhoodan missionaries, give positive evidence of change of heart are apt soon to relapse into their old ways of life. One such landlord was a landowner of Sakhwara, who used to make the lives of labourers miserable. He gave his land

in Bhoodan and gave assurances of good treatment to his labourers. But he soon went back to his old ways and ill-treated them. Accustomed to domination they bore it patiently. At last the women among them raised the standard of revolt. They were allowed to go home daily for half an hour to feed their babes. One day, for the first time, there was a cut in wages in respect of this half-hour's break. The women protested. The manager was adamant. They refused to work. So did the men. After two days the cut in wages was restored. That was, one may presume, the first fruit of Sadhakji's lessons. Another demonstration of self-reliance and self-assertion born of self-respect was to follow immediately.

In contravention of the provisions of the Minimum Wages Act, the wages paid to those labourers were quite inadequate. Having been now raised to the status of sons of the land, they were in no mood to tolerate such injustice and insisted on an increase in wages. They might have continued to compensate themselves for low wages, as they did before, by pilfering part of the produce. Thanks to Bhoodan, however, their consciences could not now permit them to stoop to such practices. To avoid difficulties, Bhoodan workers intervened. But their persuasions had no effect on the landlord. All the labourers then decided to go on strike. They had by this time learnt to rely on moral force. Eleven villages in the neighbourhood refused to supply labour to the owners of land. After a four-week struggle the landlord relented. Where did the strength of the villagers come from? Damodar's answer to this question is worth noting: "The sense of self-reliance and self-respect born of the affectionate touch of mother earth," in other words, the force came from within and it is on this force that Vinoba asks his followers to rely for all things material, as well as spiritual.

One of the satisfactory features of distribution of land

is that in many cases "the sons of the land" continue to work on the fields of their masters and to help production. The fear of landowners that, after receiving gifts of land, labourers would not continue to work on the fields they had formerly tilled is thus dissipated. In their own interests, the labourers like to supplement their meagre earnings. But self-interest does not always motivate the action. Bhoodan workers, therefore, make a point of persuading the cultivators to continue, wherever desirable and feasible, their friendly relations with their past masters.

Here is another illustration of the way in which the magic lamp of Bhoodan illumines the hearts of both the landlords and the landless. At Juninibigha, six miles east of Bodh Gaya, the land offered by a manager of a monastery had been lying uncultivated for a long time. The labourers to whom it was offered declined to accept it. Thanks to the kindness of the manager himself, they said, they were content and happy as labourers. If, however, it was proposed to give them land, they would gratefully accept it, provided it was one of the best cultivable plots. Moved by this appeal, the manager gave them some of the best land cultivated. The uncultivated land was also accepted, after it was arranged to dig wells. Having tilled all the land, the sons of the land took cart loads of produce, as they used to do before, to the monastery.

"Why have you brought these carts here?" asked the manager in astonishment.

"You may keep your share and give us ours," said the simple people.

"No more talk now of the owner's share!" he said. "The land is yours. All the produce is yours. Vinobaji has given to you what really should have belonged to you. Bless him and enjoy the fruits of your labour!"

In another case, the land available for distribution was just sufficient for four families. The number of applicant

families was, however, nine. Five had to withdraw. Who should be those five? It was by no means a simple problem, as the need of all the nine families was equally insistent. It did not, however, take more than five minutes before they settled the problem for themselves. Five families withdrew cheerfully. "We will wait," they said. "Our landlord has not yet given any of his land. Perhaps he will do so, and we may then get it. Meanwhile let the other four families have this land!"

This is the miracle of Bhoodan; the gift of its saintly leader is the milk of human kindness, flowing in streams all over the country. This is the social and spiritual significance of Vinoba's mission. This is the alchemy with which hearts corrupted by the craving for gold, hearts corroded with the rust of indifference and apathy, hearts hardened by selfishness and greed, are turned daily into hearts of gold. This is the way in which, through the power of God, Vinobaji opens the way for the transformation of the existing human society into the Family of God! It is, however, only a beginning. There is a long distance yet to go before the final ideal is realised.

Chapter Eleven

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BHOODAN

THERE IS a traditional belief among the people of India that the world is kept going by holy men, through their lives of piety and austerity. By identifying the individual self with the Universal Self, the Rishis, or holy men, taught man to understand his kinship with God and to have a universal outlook on life. This concept of universality and of universal goodness, which underlies Vinoba's mission was expressed in the vow taken by Gautama Buddha and communicated to his disciples 2,500 years ago. "I do not want to go to heaven until everyone has entered," he said. How quickly would human relationships be improved and the goal of "the good of all" be reached if every member of the Family of God were filled with the same spirit and were to think and act in that spirit!

This doctrine of universal goodness, named "Sarvodaya" by Gandhi, is often mentioned as the Gandhian Way of Life. It might as well be called the Vinobian Way of Life, for the Bhoodan mission is a stupendous effort to penetrate more deeply into the Sarvodaya doctrine than has been done hitherto and to inspire thousands upon thousands to strive to live up to it.

The ancient ideal of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth still remains an ideal. Bhoodan seeks, however, to make it a reality by developing the concept of Sarvodaya and by applying its principles and teaching to the present-day social, economic, political, ethical and religious problems of society. That is the spiritual significance of Vinobaji's

mission. To bring about a radical change in society it is essential that everyone should generate thoughts about unity of mind, unity of heart and unity of purpose. The task before Vinobaji and his workers, therefore, is the conversion, purification and moral regeneration of society. It is both the key to their success and the test of their work. People could be truly happy only in so far as they are pure of mind and spirit. Only then can the problem of life, including that of land, be solved.

The spiritual aspect of Vinobaji's mission has been amply stressed in this book. The sort of purification on which Vinoba relies has, however, a mystic significance which needs clarification. Often he reminds his audience of the immanence, or the indwelling, of God in man. One has only to gaze into a purified heart to find Him there. A mystic of Islam embraces this same doctrine. To him, however, such deification of man savours somewhat of blasphemy. He, therefore, tenders his apology for it in these touching words:

O heart, we have searched from end to end,
I saw in thee nought save the Beloved,
Call me not infidel, O heart,
If I say, Thou Thyself art He!"

We hear in these verses a distinct echo of the wisdom of the Vedas: "Thou Art It!" "Thou thyself, thy own true self, belongs to the Eternal Self; the Atman or Self within thee is the true Brahma."

Yourself, says the author of *Gulshan-i-Raz,* a classic on Sufism, "is a copy made in the image of God. Seek in yourself all that you desire to know." Self in this context means the real self as distinguished from the baser, material self. This attainment of self-knowledge is the first step on the pathway to Reality. The traveller on

this path then sees that his deeper self, which Plotinus called "Higher Life," is always tending towards union with God, while the surface self or lower life, designed for intercourse with the outward world, always tends to gravitate downwards. Thus he finds himself involved in a conflict between the two selves, between the spirit of good and the spirit of evil, and this struggle can only be ended by self-simplification or cleansing. Whatever separates the true self from all that is good and beautiful must be cast aside daily. Mysticism thus acquires a positive, practical aspect. Vinoba does not preach spiritual softness or stagnation. He, whose life has been a life of austerity and serenity, refrains from advocating a life of ascetic austerity or passivity. He merely insists on purification of the heart, and encourages the cultivation of qualities and virtues indispensable to the ideal society of his dream—self-knowledge, self-discipline, self-reliance, self-sacrifice. Man will be inwardly free only when the I, the Me, and the Mine are no longer the centre of his consciousness. Then only can he arrive at the summit of his personality. No siren voice of self can then lure him away from the path of universal goodness; Bhoodan is thus a lesson in the spiritual as well as the practical aspects of the Sarvodaya philosophy.

Trudging from village to village, entering the hearts of the people, influencing their thoughts, inclinations and will, Vinoba has succeeded in no small measure in cleansing the hearts of thousands. His followers do likewise. They, too, have served loyally as torch-bearers in this sacrifice for the purification, emancipation, enlightenment and mass conversion of hearts. The idea that the mass conversion of the entire population, including the privileged classes, can be accomplished as easily and peacefully as Vinoba hopes, seems at first sight impossible. Only an incorrigible optimist can share his robust faith that the

Lord who dwells in him dwells also in the hearts of all others. Daily experience of the ape and the tiger dwelling in man seems to belie such faith. But Vinoba's faith in the possibility of conversion is not his alone. It is to be found in the teaching of sages from the dawn of history. It is this cheering belief, held by the thinkers and philosophers, the pioneers of reform and the law-givers, in the innate goodness of man that has sustained the people of India down the centuries through all their vicissitudes. Vinoba is convinced that if people were to meditate on this teaching and to adjust their conduct and actions accordingly, all their differences would vanish like mist before the rising sun. Without faith nothing noble is ever achieved. Action follows faith and conviction follows action. Conviction is faith affirmed by experience. Vinoba's entire life work has been inspired by faith. His personal experience of seemingly impossible tasks accomplished by faith is the source of the optimism with which he has embarked on his mission. "Let me assert as a truth of personal experience," he said on the occasion of the Sevapuri Conference in April 1952, "that whatever resolves have risen in my mind have been invariably fulfilled."

The way in which landowners have been converted, the way in which a large number of them have converted themselves, the way in which many more, rich and poor, have in the course of the spiritual pilgrimage shown a real desire to lift the burden of poverty and misery from their fellow-creatures, is the most encouraging feature of the history of this movement. This revolution that is now in progress proves that at least in rural India the spirit of Gandhiji is still alive. To the foregoing instances which justify Vinoba's faith in human nature two more illustrations of the innate goodness of the human heart must be added.

In the year 1953, Vinoba was camping in a village in the Naini Tal district. One bitterly cold morning, his secretary Damodardas saw an old woman sitting shivering on the veranda of the house where the Bhoodan party had spent the night.

"Mother, where do you come from?" he asked.

"I come from Kaladugi village," said the grey-haired visitor.

"How far away is it from here?"

"Six miles."

"In such chilly weather, how did you manage to cover such a long distance?"

"I came last night. It was too late to awaken anyone here."

"You have been sitting all night in the open in such chilly weather!" exclaimed Damodardas.

"Never mind," she said, "I have got a small piece of land and I wish to offer it to Maharaj, if he would kindly accept it. Please bring the gift deeds for my thumb impression. Then I must hurry back to my village."

At the prayer meeting that day, Vinoba's comment on this incident was:

"The old mother stayed the whole night shivering in extreme cold. Why? Not because of a desire to receive anything from anybody, but because she wanted to offer all that she possessed and that was most dear to her. This is a striking illustration of non-violent revolution. It is by such spontaneous gifts that the Yagna gains in sanctity and the movement becomes as pure as the sacrificial fire."

In Gaziabad a woman went to the Saint's cottage, sat by his side, and said: "I have eleven acres and a half with me. Please receive it."

Vinobaji asked, "What is your husband?"

She replied, "He is a lawyer. With his earnings we can well manage our household."

"Why didn't you bring him?" asked Vinoba.

"He is not well, otherwise he would have loved to come."

"You are giving your entire land!" Vinoba exclaimed.

"If," she said, "we can live on earnings from the legal profession, why should we keep this land? The sacred writings have taught me the greatness of gifts. So please accept this small gift of mine."

The next step after a change of heart is "the levelling of the field." Bhoodan does not stop at the distribution of land. It aims at levelling up the lower strata of society. That does not imply the establishment of equality of income or property. Bhoodan merely emphasises the doctrine that land, like air and water, should be available to all, not that everyone should share it equally. The sacrifice of wealth, as advocated at present, implies equitable, not equal, distribution of wealth in order to give the poor the wherewithal for their needs.

Why did not Vinoba approach the Government for legislation to help the movement and hasten the process of equitable distribution and social revolution? In reply to this question, repeatedly put to Vinobaji, he has pointed out that the suggestion goes counter to the deep spiritual thought behind his mission. The moral law demands that he should transform people so that they themselves should voluntarily and cheerfully distribute land or surplus wealth amongst the needy. It is through their change of heart that he attempts to remove the disparity in the ownership of property. Is it, he asks, because of legislation or regulation that a mother feeds her baby? It is the power of love in the heart of man that makes life full and happy. Not that Vinoba is against legislation, or that he would like to do without it; the Government may introduce legislation when his movement has paved the way for it, or even before that time. But so far as his mission is concerned,

his efforts and his followers' efforts will be directed towards building up the spiritual strength and power of the people, which is the foundation of the new order of society that he seeks to build. Too often, instead of relying on their inherent strength, people looked to the Government to do everything. It seemed that they used the name of the Government more than that of God. "I feel at times," said Vinoba in one of his speeches during his tour of Bihar, "that August 15, 1947, the day of our independence, was rather the day which heralded an era of dependence! Until then our leaders worked for and served the people. . . . Now, however, when we are independent, we seem to have lost all initiative. The people are, after all, stronger than the Government. They are the well; the Government is but a bucket."

A democratic government may use its police force, but that could not create nor be as effective as the united strength of the people. Nor would it help people to be free from dependence on the State. Coercion by the sword, by legislation or by a police force may bring about the desired redistribution of property and reduce gross inequalities. But can it transform individuals and society, as envisaged in the philosophy of life underlying the Bhoodan mission? Could it succeed in transforming unjust systems? Revolution brought about by force may abolish vested interests and change the outward form of the social structure, but it cannot change man inwardly. It would leave the heart untouched and the mental outlook unaltered. Without the conversion of man and, through him, of society, the dream of inaugurating the kingdom of love on earth would remain a dream.

The existing order of society is based on self-interest. The new order will, however, be founded on the ideal of selflessness, self-denial and self-sacrifice. The philosophy behind it lays down two fundamental principles:

1.—Whatever a person possesses belongs to God, that is to say, to mankind. One can draw from it as much as is needed and return the rest to society. No one can be the Lord of earth or the Lord of wealth. The wealth acquired and accumulated by a person is due not merely to his own efforts but to the collective effort of all, and can only be held for the benefit of all.

2.—Man may appear to be selfish and sordid. But despite his shortcomings, he is good at heart and can be prevailed upon to co-operate with the good and to turn away from ways of living which adversely affect the life and happiness of others. The divine spark in him will sooner or later make him realise that he can live happily on earth without being anti-social, without exploiting the labour of others, without clinging to surplus wealth to which he has no right and which belongs to and should be used for the benefit of the poor.

Such is Vinobaji's faith in the essential goodness of men, whose faith in their turn is based on faith in a supreme ethical power that makes for righteousness. Bhoodan thus becomes a spiritual pilgrimage to the shrine of a new order of society. In the course of this pilgrimage, thousands of owners of land, large and small, have responded cheerfully to Vinoba's appeal. Their change has led to the conversion of the poor. Rural India is being transformed beyond expectation. When Vinoba started on his pilgrimage there were many who looked upon it merely as the idealism of a saint. During the last five years the vigour and vitality of the movement have demonstrated the practical possibilities of his programmes. The vast areas of land offered, accepted and distributed; the growing number of village folk who have benefited in consequence and been drawn together in brotherly love; the devotion, moral earnestness and talent devoted to the

movement and the methodical manner in which it is carried on, have dispelled all doubts. But will the fifty million acres of land be given to him by the end of 1957?

"Come to me as thy sole refuge abandoning all other laws," was the call of the Gita to the devotee who had set his feet on the path of worship. This is now the clarion call of Bhoodan to all men of goodwill. It is the earnest appeal of Vinoba. He has complete faith in his doctrine of sacrifice, and he is joined in this faith and in his passion for service by an ever-increasing number of devout men and women who are now feeding the flames of the sacrificial fire. These flames will soar higher and higher as more and more men and women of goodwill come forward to follow in the footsteps of the most remarkable sage of this century.

What hope is there for success? Vinoba is certainly hopeful, but he has no illusions as to the distance to be covered before the goal is reached. It is not after all the measure of success attained so much as the excellence of the cause and the magnificence of leadership and effort that count. Vinoba has never claimed for the movement administrative efficiency or the driving force that can ensure quick results. He is only a teacher endeavouring to spiritualise society and enrich the lives of his countrymen. Whether the goal is reached within a year or more, or whether mankind will have to wait for it for an unpredictable period, he has placed in the hands of the people the key to the solution of all the problems of life, and has opened the door of hope in these days of gloom.

Through Faith the Fire is kindled,
Through Faith the Oblation is obtained.

THE END

SOORYAKANT PARIKH.
Private Secretary to
Jaykrishna Harivallabhdas.

Tele : 78014
Patdi Building, Ellisbridge,
Ahmedabad-6.

Tele : 51194
Shri Ambica Mills Ltd., Ahmedabad-8.

ઈ. ૭૮૦૧૪
પાટડી બીલ્ડીંગ, ગ્રેવીસબ્રીજ, અમદાવાદ-૬.

સૂર્યકાન્ત પરીખ

રહસ્યમંત્રી

શ્રી જયકૃષ્ણ હરિવલ્લભદાસ

૨૬૧૬૫ ૨૯.
૮-કાપડિયા માર્કેટ ઓફ સ્ટેશન રોડ, અમદાવાદ-૨.

This Book

Is the latest study of the life and philosophy of Vinoba Bhave and the development of the Bhoodan movement as a new instrument for social change. The gift of land is but one of the five gifts required by Vinoba Bhave from those who accept his message. It is a practical demonstration of the teachings of his master, Ghandiji.

Written by one of Vinoba Bhave's oldest associates, this book has his approval and the prestige of a long, specially written introduction by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the President of India.

COMET BOOKS

YOUR BABY: *A Guide for Parents Everywhere*	
THE UNIVERSE & DR. EINSTEIN	*Lincoln Barnett*
ALBERT SCHWEITZER, *An Introduction*	*J. Feschotte*
THE EISENHOWER BROTHERS	*Bela Kornitzer*
GUIDE TO THE MOON	*Patrick Moore, F.R.A.S.*
THE LIVING JEFFERSON	*James T. Adams*
SHAKESPEARE	*Ivor Brown*
AMBASSADOR'S REPORT	*Chester Bowles*
THE FIVE GIFTS	*R. P. Masani*
HOW ENGINES WORK	*Michael Gibson*
HELEN KELLER	*Van Wyck Brooks*
GUIDE TO THE PLANETS	*Patrick Moore, F.R.A.S.*
WESTWARD THE WOMEN	*Nancy Wilson Ross*
THE STORY OF OUR CIVILISATION	*Philip Lee Ralph*
EXPLAINING THE ATOM	*Hecht and Rabinowitch*
THE PROBLEM OF POWER	*Lord Radcliffe*
AN ALMANAC OF LIBERTY	*William O. Douglas*
MANKIND AGAINST THE KILLERS	*James Hemming*
SOUTH WITH SCOTT	*Lord Mountevans*